

Forgiving Oneself



As Alexandra Asseily says in the film, *“I think that if we all just remember that if we forgive ourselves, it’s a wonderful beginning to forgiveness. Because actually if we really forgive ourselves for all the wickedness we think we have inside or all the things we think are wrong with ourselves, we would then be so much more compassionate with others. And I think probably it’s our lack of compassion with ourselves that makes us so upset with others.”*

Forgiving yourself is an opportunity to free you of pain and anger that has built up over time. Forgiveness moves you from focusing on a past hurt into the present. You may not forget the hurtful event, but you can move on with your life. This choice to forgive yourself may not be a one-time event and may take time to do, but over time you will find yourself living without the familiar pain you are used to carrying with you. Forgiving yourself may not be easy, but the alternative is choosing to live with the pain of bitterness and resentment toward yourself.

Failure to forgive ourselves can result in

- Continually being hurt by unresolved pain, suffering and ways of acting that harm us
- Low self-esteem and low self-worth
- Being overly defensive or distant in relationships
- Unnecessary guilt and remorse that wear us down.
- Self-destructive behavior

Forgiving ourselves can have many benefits such as:

- Learning to love yourself in healthy ways and no longer beating yourself up for your mistakes
- Realizing we are human and all make mistakes
- Letting go of hurtful memories and painful events and developing an optimistic view for the future
- Realizing you have value and self-worth can open you up to loving others in new ways and demanding respect for yourself

Self-forgiveness Exercise:

1. Write down an event for which you wish to seek forgiveness from yourself. Recall areas in your life where bitterness, resentment and unforgiveness reside. Write with as much detail and clarity as you can recall.
 - a. Recognize the hurt.
 - b. Forgiveness does not minimize the hurt and pain you feel. Realize what hurt you feel and that you can move past the hurt when you are ready to choose to forgive.

2. Read over the event you have written. Have you held onto these feelings a long time? Does this area affect the way you live your life and interact with others?
 - a. You may want to tell your story to a trusted friend, family member or counselor.
3. Grieve the hurt / damage done and work through any anger. It is very natural to be angry at oneself for not being perfect, but no one is perfect.
 - a. Realize you are not perfect; forgive yourself for what you did wrong.
 - b. Choose to release the negative emotions associated with the incident
 - c. Realize that we all make mistakes, are imperfect and in need of forgiveness. Forgive yourself for any wrongs you have done
 - d. Realize that you are a good person and not deserving of being punished or hurt. Let go of pain. If you still hold onto pain and resentment, it will be harder to give and receive forgiveness.
4. Shred or burn the list as a visual symbol of letting go.
5. Repeat the exercise for other areas of unforgiveness.
6. Move forward in your life without the burden of unforgiveness.
 - a. Give yourself permission to shed the hurt, pain, anger and to begin to heal by living in peace.
 - b. When the event or pain from the event resurface, remind yourself that you have forgiven yourself and that you chose to move on with your life without the pain.

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Forgiving Another Person



Even in the closest of our relationships we can harbor unforgiveness. Taking some time to reflect on our relationship can help us identify and dislodge any unforgiveness that may be present. If pain and resentment are left unchecked in our relationship, and the healing power of forgiveness has not been made use of, resentment, bitterness or a loss of hope could develop.

We often carry around misperceptions of what forgiveness is and these misperceptions impede our ability to forgive or be forgiven. It is important to know what forgiveness is not.

- Forgiveness is not forgetting. We often will not forget a hurtful event, but we can still seek and grant forgiveness.
- Forgiveness is not having resolved all the painful feelings. Often the hurtful feelings will last. But we can still seek and grant forgiveness.
- Forgiveness is not absolving someone from the responsibility of what they have done. What they did was wrong; you are simply choosing to not let it negatively impact you (and your relationship) anymore.
- Forgiveness is not accepting being continually hurt. If you are in an abusive relationship or one in which you are regularly being hurt, then that pattern must change. You do not deserve to be hurt. This may require staying away from the offending person to protect yourself.
- Forgiveness does not mean the relationship is always back to where it was before. If the offense is minor, you might be able to go back to where you were. If the offense is serious, it may take time (even years) to rebuild trust in the relationship. Forgiveness is simply starting this healing process.

Exercise in Forgiving Someone Else (even if they are not present):

1. Write about a time or incident that you wish to forgive someone.
 - a. Write out all the thoughts and feelings associated with this event, the more detail the better.
 - b. How has this incident impacted your life? How much energy do you give to it? What was your involvement in the event? How has the event impacted your self-esteem and self-worth?
2. Think about ways that you can take ownership of your actions.
 - a. When thinking of your actions, do you hold onto resentment to keep the other person beneath you? Do you blame them for the feelings you feel?
 - b. How can you begin to take responsibility for your feelings and actions in the future?
3. Think of a variety of ways that you can seek forgiveness from the other party.

4. Forgive them in your heart and mind and if appropriate, plan how to forgive them personally.
 - a. If necessary, also think of ways to avoiding being hurt by this person or others in the future.
5. Repeat the exercise for as many people you wish to seek forgiveness.

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FORGIVING YOUR SPOUSE



Spouses/Couples Forgiveness Exercise:

(If forgiveness is difficult for you or rarely done in your relationship, try this exercise with a less hurtful issue before conducting it with deeper more painful issues. Forgiveness, like any virtue, takes practice.)

1. When you both agree that you are ready to discuss the issue, set a time and place to discuss the issue at hand.
 - a. Cover only one item at a time. The laundry list approach rarely leads to helpful conversation.
 - b. Prepare yourself to be open and honest and to fully hear out the other person's side of the story.
2. Take time to listen to one another's side of the situation without interrupting. Don't give advice. Don't allow yourself to be distracted. Turn off your cell phone, blackberry, television, put the kids to bed, get a babysitter, etc.
 - a. Simply listen to and understand your partner's side of the story. Ask clarifying questions.
 - b. Seek to understand not just the facts of the situation but the feelings as well.
 - c. Reflect back what you believe you hear your partner is saying to assure that you both have the same information and the same understanding of that information.
3. When one person has finished sharing his or her side and feels understood, the other person gets a chance to be heard out fully.
4. Once you both feel understood and heard - Request Forgiveness.
 - a. Throughout the conversation, hopefully offending parties will be more aware of the hurt they caused (in many cases both parties have something to be sorry for). Ask for forgiveness, being as specific as possible. Say something like, "I'm sorry for that (Name what was wrong about the action you took or the words that you said)."
 - b. Requesting an apology can be very healing to the offended party.
5. Grant Forgiveness.
 - a. When forgiveness is being asked of you, be sure to acknowledge the apology. If you are ready, grant forgiveness. Simply saying, "It's OK" is not sufficient. It is not OK. The person is requesting forgiveness of you. Tell him/her if you forgive him/her. If not, say "I accept your apology. But I need more time to work through the painful feelings."

6. When you are ready to forgive or have been forgiven, move on from the hurtful event and discuss ways to avoid this pain in the future.
 - a. This may include developing new ways of relating to one another and getting rid of offensive behaviors.
 - b. The offender in particular should verbalize new ways he/she will act so as not to hurt the other.
 - c. Hug as a physical sign that you are moving on and wish a loving relationship to flourish between the two of you.
7. Allow time for trust and healing to occur
 - a. If the offense was very hurtful, it may take time for trust and healing to occur.
 - b. Your forgiveness and time together has begun the road to healing. Be patient.

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Promoting forgiveness in the family



Here are some suggestions on how to create a home where forgiveness can grow and flourish

Try not to let transgressions happen. It seems obvious, but the most surefire way to prevent negative unforgiving feelings from building up within the family is to treat each other with love and respect. Love is being willing to value one's partner or child, and it involves treating that person with the respect he or she deserves as a human regardless of how badly the person messes up or disappoints you. People are imperfect and will, in fact, at times mess up. Nevertheless, if people treat each other with mutual respect, those transgressions occur less frequently.

Keep a short list. When the other person messes up, do not allow the hurts to continue to build and fester as if it were an infected wound. Sometimes, it is impossible to discuss wrongs immediately. Sometimes the anger level is so high that immediate discussion might be counterproductive. But as soon as possible, try to speak respectfully about the transgression and come to a resolution.

Do not keep score. Not keeping score keeps us and asked loving each other rather than counting the number of injustices perceived.

Be quicker to say "I'm sorry" than to expect the other person to apologize. When people live in close relationships, they tend to experience as important the things that are done wrong to them more than they are bothered by the things they do wrong to the other person. People therefore naturally tend to look for times when the other person should be apologizing for his or her actions. For a harmonious family, people should be vigilant to detect the times when they themselves might have hurt a family member. The offender should seek out the harmed party to apologize quickly and thoroughly. The offender should take responsibility for his or her own acts and tried to assure the offended party at the offender will try not to act hurtfully again.

Begin with the couple, not the children. The foundation for a forgiving family is the relationship between the parents. Although children how way of turning the family into a child centered enterprise the best families have a strong and loving relationship between the partners that close to the children instead of focusing the love and attention on the children and holding it close to the partner. Therefore, encourage family members to keep the parental relationship strong and loving.

Teach children how to forgive early in their lives. When the child is very young, the parents can encourage the child to decide to forgive. Children may not have the capacity for full deliberate emotional forgiveness, but they can learn to grant

forgiveness and not hold onto vengeful attitudes or planned paybacks or vengeance. The parents can simply instruct the children to forgive their brother or sister and describe to the children what that means. Children can learn from this instruction how to learn to make decisions to control their behavior. Parents can use modeling to teach children how to forgive. Parents can teach the children how to forgive by showing them how to forgive. Parents can also demonstrate forgiveness by practicing it with outsiders. Parents are offended or wrong to numerous times, as we all are. Instead of railing against the person who wrongs us that parents can decide to forgive and practice that attitude, keeping grudge holding, vengeance, and critical comments to a minimum.

Parents can develop family rules. A family rule might be, quote we do not hold onto anger toward members of the family," or quote we do not act vengefully toward people who have wronged us." Whatever rules that the family agrees upon, it is important that the parents practice those rules and enforce them and their children. Throughout the lifespan, transgressions occur. When people expect to remain in close personal contact, they must do something to work out their differences and later to heal the painful wounds that transgressions can be. In close personal relationships, much of this can be worked out in a two-way conversation or in therapy involving the affected parties. But in social units like family school or work place it is rare that only two parties are affected.

If you can't seem to make progress, consider professional intervention. The family is the primary building block of society, and therapists see many people unhappy with their family. As a result, several interventions have been developed to promote forgiveness and reconciliation in the home.

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