Forgiving and Forgetting

What does “forgiving” mean in a relationship?

- Understanding that making mistakes is part of being human. It isn’t unusual to hear something that hurts you. Sometimes it wasn’t meant the way it sounded.
- Accepting an apology - Believe them when they say they’re “sorry.”
- Forgiving is a way to reopen and heal the channels of communication.
- Helping calm the fears of rejection, failure, or guilt.
- An act of compassion, humanity, and gentleness - Letting someone know that she/he is valued as a person with potential for goodness.

What does “forgetting” mean in a relationship?

- You don’t really forget what happened, but you can put the issues behind you, and not bring them up again and again.
- “Clearing the air” and letting go of anger, hurt, and pain over what happened.
- An act of encouragement and support to assist the other person to rebuild, reconnect, and re-establish caring, healthy relationships.
- Forgetting doesn’t mean you return to an abusive or toxic relationship, but you can wish them well in their future.

What can happen if you don’t forgive?

- Without being resolved, the pain and hurt will stay with you.
- Guilt and sadness continue from problems in the relationship.
  - Seeking revenge and paybacks from one another
  - Being angry and bitter.
  - Feeling defensive, self-protective, or distant
  - Blaming each other
  - Negative thinking or behaviors
  - Feeling lost or afraid – Avoiding sharing or showing your feelings
  - Being afraid to make mistakes. Low self-esteem
  - Being overwhelmed by fear of failure, rejection, or conflict
  - Having high stress in relationships
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What do people think when they refuse to forgive or forget?

- “You don’t deserve any kindness, concern, or forgiveness for what you did.”
- “It hurt so much that I’ll never be able to forgive you.”
- “I’ll never let you forget what you did, no matter how sorry you are.”
- “People who hurt other people deserve the worst that life has to offer.”
- “I resent everyone who has hurt me - I will make sure I’m never hurt again.”

What new behavior can help us to forgive and forget?

- Letting go of past hurt and pain
- Letting go and letting [God] or [your beliefs] lead you during hurtful times
- Letting go of fears for the future and allowing yourself to take a risk
- Letting go of anger, hostility and resentment
- Overlooking slight relapses or steps backward
- Developing an openness to the belief that people can change (but only if they want to) and realizing we can’t make other people change
- Being open and honest with others about how you have been hurt
- Seeking professional help when necessary for unhealthy, distant or cold relationships
- Recognizing your part in what happened (It takes two to fight.)
- Identifying and replacing irrational beliefs that make it harder to forgive

Discussion: How do you forgive others?

List something that you have been unable to forgive someone for.

How much energy, is sapped from you when you think about the hurt you went through?

What do I gain from blaming others for my feelings?

How can you put the past behind you and look forward, learning to trust again?