

Forgiving and Forgetting

What does “forgiving” mean?

- Forgiving means understanding that **making mistakes is part of being human**. Remember that when you hear people say things that hurt your feelings, often they weren’t meant the way they sounded.
- Accept an apology - Believe people when they say they’re “sorry.”
- Forgiving is a way to reopen and heal the channels of communication.
- It helps calm the fears of rejection, failure, or guilt.
- Forgiveness can be an act of compassion, humanity, and gentleness – It can let someone know that she/he is valued as a person with potential for goodness.
- But you don’t actually have to tell someone that they are forgiven. You can forgive someone in your heart (to make yourself feel better), without even telling them.
- Forgiving can be done for your sake rather than for another person. But talking about it can be helpful to mend relationships.

What does “forgetting” mean?

- You don’t really “forget” what happened, but you can put the issues behind you, and not bring them up again and again.
- You “clear the air” and let go of anger, hurt, and pain over what happened.
- Forgetting encourages and helps the other person to rebuild, reconnect, and re-establish caring, healthy relationships.
- Forgetting **doesn’t** mean that you return to an abusive or unhealthy relationship. You can continue to avoid people who are toxic to you, while you wish them well in their future without you.
- Understand that some people do not know how or are not able to love others enough to be in a healthy relationship with you. If you think of it that way, you may be able to feel sorry for them because “it’s their loss.”

What can happen if you don’t forgive?

- Without forgiveness, the pain and hurt will stay with you. Guilt and sadness continue, along with more problems in relationships. *Which of the following do you do?*
 - Seek revenge and payback, become angry and bitter, or blame each other
 - Feel defensive, self-protective, or distant
 - Have negative thinking or unhealthy behaviors
 - Feel lost or afraid – Avoid sharing or showing your feelings

Forgiving and Forgetting

- Have fear of making mistakes, failure, rejection, or conflict
- Have high stress in relationships and may have low self-esteem

What do people think when they refuse to forgive?

- “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 can help us to forgive and forget?

- Let go of past hurt and pain.
- Let go and letting [God or your other spiritual beliefs] lead you during hurtful times.
- Let go of fears for the future and allow yourself to take a risk.
- Let go of anger, hostility and resentment.
- Overlook slight relapses or steps backward.
- Develop an openness to the belief that people can change (but only if they want to) and realize that **we can’t make other people change**. The only thing we can change is ourselves.
- Be open and honest with others about how you have been hurt.
- Seek professional help when necessary for unhealthy, distant or cold relationships.
- Recognize your part in what happened because “It takes two to fight”.
- Identify and replace irrational beliefs that make it harder to forgive.

Ask Yourself: 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?

Forgiving and Forgetting

What do I gain from blaming others for my feelings?

How can you put the past behind you?

How can you look forward, learning to trust again?

Revised from Messina, J. & Messina, C. (2009). Handling forgiving and forgetting. Retrieved from <http://www.jamesimessina.com/improvingrelationships/forgivingforgetting.html>