



Forgiveness



HEATHER MEISELMAN, MSW, LCSW

25 YEARS OF PROVIDING SERVICE



FORGIVENESS

Many people have the wrong idea about what it means to forgive which makes the process of forgiving more complex and difficult. Sometimes we focus on forgiving the wrong thing and other times we sabotage ourselves because we truly are not ready to forgive. Let's take a moment to understand more accurately what forgiveness is about.

WHAT IS FORGIVENESS?

One of the most important distinctions to make is that forgiveness is an action we take for ourselves, not one we do for the person who has hurt us. Repeat after me....."We forgive for US, not for THEM". When we choose NOT to forgive what we are actually doing is punishing ourselves for the rest of eternity for something that someone else has done. We give this person, who has done us wrong, a power over our lives. In a way we give them the ability to control our lives by influencing the way we think and interact with others simply by refusing to forgive them.

FORGIVENESS IS NOT...

Forgiveness does not mean you excuse the other person's action(s). Just because we forgive someone does not mean we are saying their behavior was correct or right. We also are not giving them permission to continue to act in an offensive manner. Accepting an unpleasant scenario that has occurred is not the same as accepting what the offender was right and you were wrong.

WHY IS FORGIVING SO DIFFICULT?

Forgiving is giving up on the desire for the unpleasant situation to be reversed or changed in some way. It's putting an end to the wishing that things had happened differently. Before you can forgive you need to allow yourself to move from anger to sadness and into acceptance. Does this sound familiar? If it does it's because these are the steps one goes through while grieving. Forgiving involves grieving because it's releasing the sadness and anger over what happened and deciding to move past it. This grief is what makes it so difficult to forgive. Grief is painful and so is the event & the person that hurt you.

An Exercise on Forgiveness

In a journal or notebook:

1. Write the names of those you feel you need to forgive. It can be for something very small or something big. It can be from our past or more recently.
2. Write a letter to the person who has hurt you. Make sure to express your feelings and truly dig deep. Describe in detail how you felt, why you were angry and how it has affected your life. Also, let them know why you are choosing to forgive and how your life will benefit from letting go of the resentment. Keep the letter to yourself. The other person doesn't even need to know you wrote it. Keep it as a reminder of your decision to forgive and move on.

Heather Cohen Meiselman, MSW LCSW

(561) 703-3401 • HCMeiselmanLCSW@gmail.com





UNDERSTANDING YOUR FEELINGS

It's time to explore how this negative experience has impacted your life. It's important to include in your thought process both the upsetting event and how not being able to forgive has affected you. Spend some time reflecting on how the experience made you feel and what you had hoped would have happened instead. It may not be easy to sit with these feelings as well as to let go of these feelings but it's an important step to reconciling your feelings and allowing yourself to grieve over what did not occur. This is a very difficult step that you start by answering the questions below:

Writing Exercise -

In a journal or notebook:

How has this negative experience shaped the person I am today? How has the disappointment and anger affected my life? How would things be different if it never happened? How would it be different if I allow myself to forgive?

AN EXERCISE OF EMPATHY

Here is the challenge. Try to see things from the other person's side. Try to think about what may have caused the other person to react the way they did. Was the person operating from a place of fear or pain? Exploring this does not mean you believe their thoughts or actions to be correct, however, it is a way to try to understand what motivated this person to hurt you the way they did. Perhaps it had nothing to do with you and everything to do with their life experiences. Sometimes being able to see the other viewpoint helps us to feel less upset and angry. By examining the possible reasons for the individual to react the way they did you are practicing both empathy and possibly even compassion. Let's be clear. There is no justification for being mistreated. You are not giving the person permission to treat you poorly. You are not giving them a pass. Instead, you are helping yourself become less emotional and affected by the event that occurred.

LOOK FOR THE LESSON

Learning from what happened can lead to an opportunity to grow. Forgiving does not mean you need to forget what happened altogether. Remember the lessons learned. We learn from both positive and negative experiences. Every time we can look back on a painful experience and think about the lesson learned along with the personal growth that occurred because of this experience, you will eventually be able to look at this negative situation with gratitude. Sounds impossible right now I know but it is a process and one that does not happen overnight. If you work on your understanding of the event and the affects, it had on you and trust the process you will find yourself on a path to forgiveness and experiencing relief from holding onto the negative emotions of the past.

WRITING LESSON -

In a journal or notebook:

What did I learn from this experience? What can I change about myself to make sure this doesn't happen again?

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WHAT TO AVOID WHEN FORGIVING:

- ✓ Don't expect an apology: Don't wait for the person to apologize. Many times, the person is not even thinking of doing so. Focus on you and do your work. Your healing does not require an apology.
- ✓ Don't hold on to anger and hate: If you hold onto these feelings, you will have difficult time moving forward in your goal to move on and forgive. You will hold onto the negative feelings and miss out on the positive feelings of acceptance and forgiveness.
- ✓ Don't focus on revenge: Thinking of revenge will be like poison to your mind. It will consume your thoughts and keep you from any progress. Revenge is self-destructive and will keep you in the past. It's time to move on.



QUOTES ON FORGIVENESS

Always forgive your enemies – nothing annoys them so much. -Oscar Wilde

"We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love." — Martin Luther King, Jr., A Gift of Love

"Never does the human soul appear so strong as when it foregoes revenge." — Edward Hubbell Chapin

"It's not an easy journey, to get to a place where you forgive people. But it is such a powerful place because it frees you." — Tyler Perry

"It's one of the greatest gifts you can give yourself, to forgive. Forgive everybody." — Maya Angelou

"Acceptance and tolerance and forgiveness; those are life-altering lessons." — Jessica Lange

"True forgiveness is when you can say, 'Thank you for that experience.'" — Oprah Winfrey

"Forgiveness is above all a personal choice, a decision of the heart to go against natural instinct to pay back evil with evil." — Pope John Paul II

"Forgiving isn't something you do for someone else. It's something you do for yourself. It's saying, 'You're not important enough to have a stranglehold on me.' It's saying, 'You don't get to trap me in the past. I am worthy of a future.'" — Jodi Picoult, The Storyteller

"Forgiveness is a strange thing. It can sometimes be easier to forgive our enemies than our friends. It can be hardest of all to forgive people we love." — Fred Rogers, Wisdom from the World According to Mister Rogers

"Forgiveness is not weak. It takes courage to face and overcome powerful emotions." — Desmond Tutu

"We may not know how to forgive, and we may not want to forgive; but the very fact we say we are willing to forgive begins the healing practice." — Louise Hay

"Forgiveness means giving up all hope for a better past." — Lily Tomlin

"One always begins to forgive a place as soon as it's left behind." — Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit*

"Though I was unaware of it at the time, that simple act of forgiveness was the beginning of an entirely new level of experiencing life for me." — Wayne Dyer, *You'll See It When You Believe It*

"A heart filled with anger has no room for love." — Joan Lunden, *Wake-Up Calls: Making the Most Out of Every Day*

"One should never do wrong in return, nor mistreat any man, no matter how one has been mistreated by him." — Socrates



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