

SOME IMPORTANT THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT FORGIVENESS

What is forgiveness?

Definition of forgiveness is a “letting go” of:

1. justifiable resentment
2. appropriate anger
3. and the probably understandable desire to punish

What is the benefit?

It is universally beneficial to every person to learn from and then move on from any hurt, harm, or setback we experience from any source in life – whether inflicted on us by a loved one, a stranger, or simply a situation. Life is full of hurts. Unfortunately, almost every person has been victimized in some way.

To forgive does not mean that we pretend not to be hurt. It means we decide not to *stay* hurt. The benefit of forgiveness is primarily to the person exercising the powerful choice to confer forgiveness, because it frees that person from living in the hurtful past. The offender may not even know of our decision to forgive. Forgiveness is a gift we give ourselves. It releases us from hurt, anger, and bitterness.

Do we have to forgive?

No, of course not. We also don't have to take medicine to get well, or go to school to learn more, or seek caring and loving relationships with others. Instead, we can stay sick, ignorant, or lonely. Forgiving benefits at least us, and perhaps others.

Not forgiving means we stay in the hurt that someone else has decided for us. It means we stay powerless. It means that the most important thing that has happened to us is the harm we experienced.

Reasons people don't forgive:

1. Excuse – not forgiving is sometimes used as a good excuse for not improving our own less than desirable behaviors. “How can you expect me to be a normal, nice person? Do you know what I've been through?”
2. Martyr - even though the hurt we experienced may be quite real, for
(over please)

some people that may lead to feelings of entitlement to special treatment, or special status as powerless unfortunates who should be given more consideration – not equal consideration.

3. Power - as if remaining a victim gives us power over the offender and possibly over other people as well. We are then “morally superior” to those who have wronged us (as if we ourselves have never wronged anyone else!). It gives us the illusion of controlling others by withholding something we think *they* desperately crave from us-our forgiveness. Again, forgiveness benefits us first. To withhold it in an attempt to wield power over others may seem quite amusing to the other person (the offender) who may not even be aware of your “ruining” his life by not being able to forgive and let go.

6 steps to forgiveness:

1. Denial – at first, we may deny that any harm occurred or that we were affected in any way. We may want to pretend it didn’t matter.
2. Self-blame - Even if it did hurt us, it was our own fault. We’ll just be more careful next time. If we just do everything right, we can’t be hurt again.
3. Victimization - We *are* hurt and it was *not* our own fault! Someone else has carelessly or intentionally hurt us!
4. Indignation - This offense is awful and I can’t stand it! How dare they do this to me. I may never be/act/live the same again.
5. Survival - I have been seriously, but not fatally, hurt. I can overcome the loss of trust I have experienced. I can get through this and I can get over the harm that was carelessly or intentionally inflicted.
6. Integration - This hurtful experience will not be forgotten or disregarded, but it will not be the end of me either. I have learned something about my own needs, and I will not forget that lesson. I am a stronger and better person because I now forgive the harm done to me so that I can move beyond it. No person – including me – can keep me where I was!

“He who seeks revenge must dig two graves” - Arab proverb

