

FORGIVENESS

SO WHAT "IS" FORGIVENESS? The Oxford Dictionary states it's "to cease feel angry or resentful towards." Simply put, forgiveness is letting go of intense emotions attached to past hurts.

WHY FORGIVE? With peace of mind as your goal, forgiveness is the process for helping you let go. It's a choice for love and healing - for a peaceful heart - for getting unstuck – for becoming more connected - and for moving on. It's something you do for your own sake. It's an internal solitary act which requires no one else but yourself.

WHAT BLOCKS forgiveness? Misconceptions, unhealthy payoffs, and negative attitudes block you from forgiving:

A. MISCONCEPTIONS block forgiveness: As important as knowing what forgiveness IS, is knowing what it is NOT. It's important to identify your misconceptions and try to let them go. Forgiveness is NOT pretending everything is just fine when it isn't. It's NOT forgetting or denying your own feelings, needs, and desires. It is NOT condoning the actions that harmed you. It is NOT changing your behaviour (E.g., you do not have to start interacting with them again.) and it does NOT mean you must talk directly to the person you have forgiven. Finally, the person who hurt you does NOT have to be alive for you to forgive them.

CONSIDER: What misconceptions about forgiveness might you have?

B. Unhealthy PAYOFFS block forgiveness: The way of forgiveness is not easy, and simply thinking of forgiving the person who hurt you can be hard to accept. One of the reasons you haven't forgiven is that "not" forgiving provides you with certain unhealthy payoffs/rewards. For example, anger and resentment may give you the illusion of power. You can use them to punish the offender - to avoid communication - to make others feel guilty - to manipulate or control - to remain a victim - to hold onto a relationship - to assert you are "right" - or to avoid the feelings under the anger.

CONSIDER: Are the payoffs you get from your anger and resentment worth the cost?

C. Negative ATTITUDES block forgiveness. You may think that "It isn't fair!" , or that to forgive is a sign of weakness rather than a sign of emotional strength. • You may insist on an apology. Perhaps you won't let go of your pride. Expecting the other person to change their behavior is another block.

CONSIDER: How willing are you to change these attitudes?

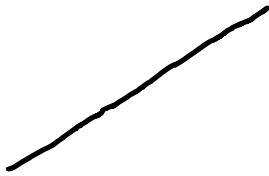
HOW DOES ONE FORGIVE? Usually slowly, and often very slowly. Forgiveness is rarely a one-time event. It's a by-product of a SIX-STAGE on-going "process.

1. DENIAL
Here we minimize or dismiss the importance or seriousness of past injuries or hurts. We ignore, deny, or avoid our thoughts and feelings about these wounds.
2. SELF-BLAME
In this stage we attempt to explain what happened to us by making ourselves responsible. "If only" we'd been different or done things differently, we believe we would not have been hurt

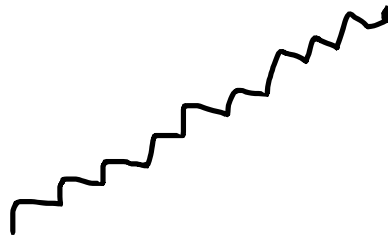
- 3. VICTIM Here we recognize that we did not deserve to be hurt. We are acutely aware that we WERE injured. In this stage we often indulge in self pity and strike out at others.
- 4. ANGER In the Anger stage we are enraged and angry at the people who injured us, as well as everyone else. We tend to attack, blame, judge, punish, act intolerant and self-righteous.
- 5. SURVIVOR At this stage, we recognize that although we were hurt, we survived. We begin to see ourselves as more than someone who was hurt, abused, or injured. We begin to rediscover our strengths, compassion and humour. We become interested in other things, and understand that we did the best we could.
- 6. INTEGRATION Finally, the emotional healing we've experienced has given us a broader understanding of our hurtful past. We're able to recognize that if we're more than our wounds then there must be more to the people who hurt us than their thoughtless, ignorant behaviour. We are willing to release them and get on with our lives.

Although these stages appear clear cut, leaving the impression that you move forward one step after the other, it's not the smooth progression one would assume. (Diagram A.) Healing is..."more like a lightning bolt, full of ups and downs, progressions and regressions, dramatic leaps and disheartening backslides." (Diagram B.)

A.



B.



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Working through this 6-Stage process, while letting go of as many blocks as you can, will reward you with the experience of forgiveness. Forgiveness is a gift to "you" of emotional healing, a peaceful heart, and an ability to become "unstuck" and move on with your life. Allow yourself the time to heal, be gentle with yourself, and don't hesitate to ask for help.

Choosing FORGIVENESS

BLOCKS:

Misconceptions.
Payoffs
Attitudes.

6 STAGES

1. Denial 4. Anger.
2. Self-Blame. 5. Survivor.
3. Victim 6. Integration

REWARDS

Love and Healing Inner
Peace Moving on

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