



FORGIVENESS

If you're not sure how to forgive, you're not alone. Many people have a difficult time understanding what forgiveness is and how it works.

One definition of forgiveness is recognizing you have been wronged, giving up your resentment, and eventually responding to the person who has hurt you with compassion. Forgiveness is not condoning, excusing, forgetting, or denying an occurrence.

Forgiveness does not mean putting yourself back in an abusive relationship.

WHY FORGIVE?

Without forgiveness, bitterness lingers. When you could be enjoying today's pleasures, you are upset with yesterday's injustices.

The person who has hurt you is not the one losing sleep over the hurt. He or she does not feel your anger or the knot in your stomach. In fact, research shows people that are inclined to forgive others enjoy better mental and physical health than those who hold grudges. When adults were asked to think about someone who wronged them, heart rate and blood pressure rose and mood worsened for those dwelling on the hurt – but not for those who had forgiven.

STEPS TO FORGIVENESS

- Realize that sometimes people hold grudges because they think it will punish the other person. Usually, it does not. Nor does a grudge assure that the person will be more considerate in the future.
- Realize that sometimes people do the best they can in a given situation. Their particular mix of "life experiences" may have caused them to behave in the way they did. Perhaps if you had those same experiences, you would have

behaved exactly the same way.

- Learn to accept that people are the way they are, regardless of any lofty expectations we may have for them. Learn to accept the imperfection of human beings.
- Make a list of who you want to forgive and for what.
- Make a list of any positive things you may have gained from the relationship.
- Write a letter to the person (no need to mail it). Acknowledge what you gained from the relationship and express forgiveness for the pain.
- Create a ceremony in which you get rid of your lists and the letter – symbolizing the end of the link between you and the person who has hurt you. One way to do this is to burn the papers and scatter the ashes.

Forgiveness gives you a chance to move on to other things. When you forgive, you regain control of your life.

Sources: Frederic Luskin, director, Stanford University's Forgiveness Project; Diana Robinson, Ph.D.; National Institute for Healthcare Research; Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond. Reprinted with permission of the Hope Heart Institute.

"Why do we allow someone who is nasty to us to rent so much space in our minds?"

Frederic Luskin