

Freeing yourself through **FORGIVENESS**



What is Forgiveness?

Forgiveness is a complex process. You don't just decide one day that you will forgive an injury and all your resentment instantly goes away. Forgiveness is a journey that takes time and a lot of painful work. It also includes:

- **Letting go.** Forgiveness allows you to release simmering anger and lingering pain. After forgiving, you may still remember that you *were* hurt and angry, but you won't *feel* that way anymore.
- **Forgetting revenge.** In order to forgive, you must give up the desire to get even. You realize that you can never make another person suffer exactly as you did, and even if you could, *their* suffering wouldn't relieve *your* pain.

Why should You Forgive?

Contrary to the myth, **forgiveness is not** a **self-sacrificing** act done for the good of the person who injured you. Forgiveness is "selfish" -it helps you feel better.

What comes to mind when you think of forgiveness? You may equate forgiveness with giving up, forgetting, or letting a guilty person go "unpunished". In *actuality, forgiveness is none of these things*. Such as:

- **An excuse**-you can blame your injury for everything that's gone wrong in your life.
- **A martyr** image-you can garner sympathy or wallow in self-pity by remaining a victim
- **Illusions of power** or control-nursing your grievances may let you think that you "hold the cards". In reality, *your feelings are holding you hostage*.

When you forgive, you release long held hurt and anger that has been *controlling the way you think and live your life*. Forgiveness frees you to be who you are, not what your negative emotions have forced you to be.

Forgiveness can be difficult. It comes from within-only you can do it. But once you let go of the bad feelings and the desire for revenge, you can *move forward without the heavy weight of emotional baggage holding you back*.

So Why Don't We Forgive?

Given the benefits, you may be thinking, "If it's so great, why don't more people forgive?" The fact is that holding on to old slights and injuries can provide you with many "advantages"

Forgiveness can be an important part of the healing process, helping free you from past pain.

470-7447 or 800-777-6110.

HelpPeopleSM
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THE STEPS TO FORGIVENESS



In their book *Forgiveness*, Sidney and Suzanne Simon describe six stages of healing and forgiveness. Although you may be able to navigate these stages on your own, therapy can help make the journey *quicker* and *less painful*.

DENIAL is the first stage of healing. In this stage, you may either minimize or deny your distress. If you are in strong denial, you may be wondering *why you feel hollow inside* and why your life seems empty even if you have everything. If you are downplaying your injury(ies), you may be spending most of your energy trying to *bury painful feelings* or cover *them up* with false smiles or empty bravado.

SELF-BLAME is the second phase of healing. By blaming yourself, you maintain the illusion that *you are in control of the other person's hurtful behavior*, and try to reassure yourself that everything will be O.K. if you can just figure out what you did wrong and fix it. You need to remember that while you may regret the way you acted in certain situations, you are never responsible for someone else's hurtful actions.

VICTIMIZATION occurs when you finally acknowledge that *you were not responsible* for your injury, but instead of feeling anger and taking action, *your shattered self-esteem allows you to wallow* in helplessness and self-pity. Victims may harbor *low expectations* for everything in their lives, or *rationalize taking advantage of others by saying, "I've suffered so much, I deserve to be indulged"*.

INDIGNATION follows the victim stage. The self-pity is over, and you are now angry at the person who hurt you (and possibly the rest of the world as well!). The *drive for revenge is strongest in this stage*. You may spend your time devising elaborate plots to get even, or interfere with the life of your injurer. You want the person who hurt you to pay for what s/he did and suffer as much as you have. The anger from this stage can be useful if it is channeled *positively* into the healing process. If not, you may act in ways that you will later regret.

SURVIVAL begins when you emerge from indignation. In this stage, you can look past your anger and acknowledge that *while you were hurt, your life will go on*. Although your injury did hurt and has changed you permanently, it has also given you new strengths, and you realize that *you are more than just an injured person*. You are reassured by the knowledge that given your situation, you did the best you could at the time.

INTEGRATION is the last stage in the healing process. You may only gradually notice that you have entered this stage. Things that used to upset you (such as references to alcoholism or infidelity) don't bother you anymore, and you have more emotional energy, freed up by releasing long-held hurt and anger. *You feel secure in the present, look forward to the future, and can remember the past without dwelling on or living in it*.

Keep in mind that everyone heals at his or her own pace. Remember too, that in times of stress or pain you may "backslide", that is, find yourself back in a stage that you thought you had completed. Remind yourself that you are in a *temporary* place, that reverting to old feelings is *part of the healing process*, and that *you will move forward again*.