

# Forgiveness Exercises

## Assessing Your Hurt Exercise

**Instructions (part 1):** Think about the time that someone hurt you. Try to get back into how you felt around that period of your life-trying to remember vividly how you reacted to the hurt. Identify which of the following kinds of hurt you felt from the person who hurt you. Then, reflect on your feelings when you learned about the person's hurtful actions.

*Disappointment:* I did not get from the person some things I wanted, some things I looked forward to, or some things that I expected.

*Rejection:* I experienced the loss of some important parts of our relationship and felt that some personal flaw of mine might have been the cause of the loss of the relationship.

*Abandonment:* I was left behind, physically or emotionally. This experience left me feeling fearful and insecure about the future.

*Ridicule:* I was the object of his/her anger and mockery. I sometimes wonder if the ridicule was deserved or accurate.

*Humiliation:* I lost every shred of pride and dignity I had.

*Betrayal:* My confidence was completely destroyed.

*Deception:* *I was lied to, cheated on, or deceived.*

*Abuse:* *I was treated in a way that degraded who I am and robbed me of my dignity- emotionally, physically, or sexually.*

*Separated, unconnected, or estranged:* *I felt a loss of connection.*

**Instructions (part 2):** Answer these questions about how you may be nurturing your hurt.

- *Are there any ways that you are possibly nurturing the hurt in your mind now? Can you think of any ways that you think about the event(s) that happened to you that may serve to continue your pain?*

- *What are some of the payoffs of nurturing your hurt?*
- *What are some of the costs of nurturing your hurt?*

## Next Step

Think of 2 recent examples in which you were hurt or offended and forgave the person who harmed you both through making a decision to forgive and through emotionally forgiving the person. Also try to discern, relative to the period immediately after the hurt or offense, whether you feel differently toward the person. Do you think differently? Do you believe the person is safe to be around? Does that mean you did not fully forgive, or is the feeling of lack of safety something else?

## Letter Exercise

**Instructions:** Write out what you would say if you were to write a letter to the transgressor expressing your decisional forgiveness-meaning that you have decided not to hold a grudge, but rather to treat the person as a valuable human being. Also tell the person of your emotional forgiveness-referring to having replaced negative emotions with positive emotions toward the person.

**Tip:** We are NOT recommending that you actually send such a letter. Sometimes that type of letter can offend the other person-especially if he or she isn't aware you still held unforgiveness against him or her. Writing down your experience will help YOU.

## Exercise for anger/frustration and forgiveness

1. Make a list of people, situations and events that have fed you in the past
2. Make a list of people, situations, and events that make you angry at the present
3. Make a list of those situations and events that you are / are angry with YOU

Example: "Why did not I say this ... Why did not I stop ... Why did not I do ... Why did I do that ...

4. Take a pillow (when you are alone and no one will bother you) and pour out your entire suppressed anger - start hitting it, boxing or punching it, and if you can even scream - to release the whole tension as if it were -Effective technique, paint a pillow, and say what you have not said

about each individual or event, and about your mistakes that follow the lower technique of forgiveness:

5. Say this phrase to every person on the list (after pillow and curse):

"I totally forgive you and release you now with love, which is the truth for both of us. I only hold that part of our relationship, which is cured and based on love. I ask that all the consequences of the mistakes of the past be repaired and forgotten forever ! I forgive you, I love you, I let you go! "

\* Repeat the words in quotation marks, for example three times (or if more), until you feel restraint. You might need to repeat the above exercise several times until you feel that there isn't any resentment left inside of you and that you feel free and get that sense of lightness in your heart.

## **Spiritual Practice for Forgiveness and Self-Forgiveness**

Meditation: At least three times, for five full minutes, repeat the idea, "Creator is the Love in which I forgive," as you close your eyes.

Search your mind for those you have not completely forgiven. Anywhere that you hold back from loving totally is a place where you are not forgiving.

To each person, say, "Creator is the Love in which I forgive you... (The name of the person) "

This will "put you in a position to forgive yourself."

After a minute or two of this, tell yourself: "Creator is the Love in which I forgive myself."

Then spend the rest of the time letting your mind come up with thoughts related to this idea of what you need to forgive yourself for.

When you have a negative reaction to anyone say, "Creator is the Love in which I forgive you."

## **Spiritual Contemplation**

Subliminally, we spend our days condemning others, and ourselves. Our judgment is so automatic, we may not even notice we are doing it. There is always a subtle interplay of "I am not good enough yet" and "you are not good enough yet."

When we bless others with our forgiveness, we allow love to heal our own unreasonable standards. Choosing to focus on the good in others releases us from the heavy self-criticism that we have buried within. When we see the best in others, we will be equally be kind to ourselves.

## Eight Essentials When Forgiving

Each person will forgive at his or her own pace. We suggest that you move through the steps below based on what works for you.

### HOW TO DO IT

1. Make a list of people who have hurt you deeply enough to warrant the effort to forgive. You can do this by asking yourself on a 1to-10 scale, How much pain do I have regarding the way this person treated me?, with 1 involving the least pain (but still significant enough to justify the time to forgive) and 10 involving the most pain. Then, order the people on this list from least painful to most painful. Start with the person lowest on this hierarchy (least painful).
2. Consider one offense by the first person on your list. Ask yourself: How has this person's offense negatively impacted my life? Reflect on the psychological and physical harm it may have caused. Consider how your views of humanity and trust of others may have changed as a result of this offense. Recognize that what happened was not okay, and allow yourself to feel any negative emotions that come up.
3. When you're ready, make a decision to forgive. Deciding to forgive involves coming to terms with what you will be doing as you forgive—extending an act of mercy toward the person who has hurt you. When we offer this mercy, we deliberately try to reduce resentment (persistent ill will) toward this person and, instead, offer him or her kindness, respect, generosity, or even love.
4. It is important to emphasize that forgiveness does not involve excusing the person's actions, forgetting what happened, or tossing justice aside. Justice and forgiveness can be practiced together. Another important caveat: To forgive is not the same as to reconcile. Reconciliation is a negotiation strategy in which two or more people come together again in mutual trust. You may not choose to reconcile with the person you are forgiving.
5. Start with cognitive exercises. Ask yourself these questions about the person who has hurt you: What was life like for this person while growing up? What wounds did he or she suffer from others that could have made him or her more likely to hurt you? What kinds of extra pressures or stresses were in this person's life at the time he or she offended you? These questions are not meant to excuse or condone, but rather to better understand the other person's areas of pain, those areas that make him or her vulnerable and human. Understanding why people commit destructive acts can also help us find more effective ways of preventing further destructive acts from occurring in the future.
6. Be aware of any little movement of your heart through which you begin to feel even slight compassion for the person who offended you. This person may have been confused, mistaken, and misguided. He or she may deeply regret his or her actions. As you think about this person, notice if you start to feel softer emotions toward him or her.
7. Try to consciously bear the pain that he or she caused you so that you do not end up throwing that pain back onto the one who offended you, or even toward unsuspecting others, such as loved ones who were not the ones who wounded you in the first place. When we are emotionally wounded, we tend to displace our pain onto others. Please be aware of this so that you are not perpetuating a legacy of anger and injuries.
8. Think of a gift of some kind that you can offer to the person you are trying to forgive. Forgiveness is an act of mercy—you are extending mercy toward someone who may not have been

merciful toward you. This could be through a smile, a returned phone call, or a good word about him or her to others. Always consider your own safety first when extending kindness and goodwill towards this person. If interacting with this person could put you in danger, find another way to express your feelings, such as by writing in a journal or engaging in a practice such as compassion meditation.

9. Finally, try to find meaning and purpose in what you have experienced. For example, as people suffer from the injustices of others, they often realize that they themselves become more sensitive to others' pain. This, in turn, can give them a sense of purpose toward helping those who are hurting. It may also motivate them to work toward preventing future injustices of a similar kind.

Once you complete the forgiveness process with one person on your list, select the next person in line and move up that list until you are forgiving the person who hurt you the most.

## **Why You Should Try It**

We have all suffered hurts and betrayals. Choosing to forgive is a way to release the distress that arises again and again from the memory of these incidents—but forgiveness is often a long and difficult process.

This exercise outlines several steps that are essential to the process of forgiveness, breaking it down into manageable components. These steps were created by Robert Enright, Ph.D., one of the world's leading forgiveness researchers. Although the exact process of forgiveness may look different for different people, most anyone can still draw upon Dr. Enright's basic principles. In certain cases, it may help to consult a trained clinician, especially if you are working through a traumatic event.

## **Why It Works**

Forgiveness is a long and often challenging process. These steps may help along the way by providing concrete guidelines. Specifically, they may help you narrow and understand whom to forgive—to name and describe your pain; to understand the difference between forgiving and excusing or reconciling; and by thinking about the person who has caused you pain in a novel way, you may begin to feel some compassion for him or her, facilitating forgiveness and reducing the ill will you hold toward this person. These steps also attune you to residual pain from your experience, and encourage you to find meaning and some positivity in it.

## **Evidence That It Works**

Baskin, T.W., & Enright, R. D. (2004). [Intervention studies on forgiveness: A meta-analysis](#). *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 82, 79-90.

Researchers compared several studies that used Dr. Enright's "process model of forgiveness," similar to the steps outlined above. All the studies were done in a clinical setting including individual and group therapy. Therapies that used these methods were shown to be effective in increasing forgiveness, and in decreasing negative psychological states such as anxiety and anger, compared to control groups.

## **Sources**

Robert Enright, Ph.D., University of Wisconsin, Madison