

Learning to Forgive - Activity Seven:

When you are wronged, hurt or attacked, in any of the following ways: physically, emotionally or sexually and it may involve betrayal, insults or desertion it appears the human reaction is to respond negatively to reciprocate with equal harm. Two other typical responses are to: either seek revenge or withdraw. Both reactions have negative effects and rarely solve the problem. History is full of examples of how this strategy can go horribly wrong. The focus of this article is you, and how forgiveness can help you. Forgiveness means suppressing or mitigating one's motivations for avoidance and revenge (which often bring with them emotions of anger, disappointment and hostility), and ideally replacing them with more positive or benevolent attitudes, feelings and behaviors. Forgiveness is not reconciliation, excusing, a pardon or condoning the event.

Why Forgive: Research and anecdotal observations suggest plenty of good reasons to practice forgiveness to those who hurt offend or victimize us. It is important to note that forgiving is something you do for you, not the person who has wronged you. Research shows improved well-being and mental health. Popular sayings such as "Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else; you are the one getting burnt". Empirical research supports this; forgiving people are less depressed, hostile, anxious, angry and neurotic. They are more likely to be happier, healthier, more agreeable and more serene. Finally the inability to forgive is associated with persistent rumination, or dwelling on revenge, preventing you moving on. So in the long run, people bother to forgive because the preoccupation with hostility and resentment serves only to hurt us, both emotionally and physically.

Activity 1 – Appreciate Being Forgiven: Before you are able to forgive another person, a good exercise is to appreciate an instance of when you yourself have been forgiven.

Activity 2 – Imagine Forgiveness: Imagine a particular person whom you blame for mistreating or offending you. Then imagine empathizing with the offender and granting forgiveness.

Activity 3 – Write a Letter of Forgiveness: This involves getting rid of your anger, bitterness and blame by writing, but not sending, a letter of forgiveness to a person who has wronged or hurt you.

Activity 4 – Practice Empathy: Empathy correlates highly with forgiveness. Try to understand, have some concern or consideration for the other person's perspective.

Activity 5 – Ruminant Less: Rumination is a barrier to forgiveness. When you find you are ruminating about a person or situation, use the "Stop" technique. Just say stop and adjust your thinking to a more positive subject.

Activity 6 – Remind Yourself: When Nelson Mandela walked out of the prison he forgave his jailers. "When I walked out of the gate I knew that if I continued to hate these people I was still in prison". When you find yourself slipping back to old ways remind yourself of this story.