

How Do I Forgive?

What is Forgiveness?

Forgiveness is the voluntary cancellation of a debt, or letting someone off the hook who doesn't deserve it. Other popular definitions of forgiveness, or forgive, include:

- To excuse for a fault or an offense
- To pardon
- To renounce anger or resentment against
- To stop being angry about or resenting somebody or somebody's behavior
- To excuse somebody for a mistake, misunderstanding, wrongdoing, or inappropriate behavior

Reconciliation means two parties coming back together again. This is very, very important. Forgiveness and reconciliation are two completely different concepts. While forgiveness is best defined as "letting someone off the hook that doesn't deserve it," reconciliation is best defined as "two parties coming back together again." It only takes one person to forgive, but it takes two to reconcile.

Myths about Forgiveness

1. You should always try to forgive and forget (it's better to forgive and remember)
2. You should not get angry when trying to forgive (anger is normal)
3. You should forgive others quickly and completely (there is no set time frame)
4. If you've truly forgiven, you'll never have feelings of hate toward the offender (recurrent angry feelings are a normal part of the process)
5. If you forgive, you're somehow minimizing the offense (if the offense was minimal, then it wouldn't necessarily require forgiveness)
6. Forgiveness is an event; something you do (forgiveness is a process that you work on over time)
7. You can't forgive until the offender apologizes (it is possible to forgive in the absence of an apology)

How to Forgive

Forgiveness is a personal and subjective process with three distinct steps:

1. Recognize your need to forgive (face the truth about the past)
2. Reassess your choice potential (Forgiveness is a choice we make for ourselves)
3. Reprogram your computer (Decide to forgive and begin the process in writing)

Forgiveness Letter Exercise

Write your forgiveness letter

Before you begin writing your forgiveness letters, keep these tips in mind:

- Keep it short, simple and to the point – if possible use only one sheet of paper
- Be honest and stick to the facts
- Don't build a case (avoid excessive details or rehashing the past)
- Don't "mudsling" (avoid attacking the offender's character – focus on behavior)

Read your letter

Once completed read your letter out loud. If you have a picture of the offender, place it in a chair and read it to them as if they were sitting there. You can also read your letter to someone that you completely trust with your feelings.

Destroy your letter – rip it, shred it, or safely burn it. This act can be symbolic of letting go of the pain, hurt and anger.