



5 Steps to Forgive the One You Love

If you asked your partner to honestly complete the following sentence: "I never mentioned it at the time but it really bothered me when you..." Most could complete this sentence without missing a beat and it might be stuff from three years ago. Like a missile it is just sitting there waiting to be launched. But here's the thing... in time, these "unforgiveness" take on a life of their own. It's as though they go airborne and circle high above your head like buzzards ready to pick at your bones. It is on the day you have an argument that they begin to land. One after another after another. You almost stand in awe of the powers marshalled against you. These resentments lead to blame, criticism, defensiveness and full blown communication breakdowns. Simply put, the end result is disconnection. And of course, the solution is genuine forgiveness. There is a lot of confusion about forgiveness, so let me start by defining the term. "Forgiveness is a conscious, deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment or vengeance toward a person or group that has harmed you, regardless of whether they actually deserve your forgiveness." – Original source unknown

Unfortunately, many people are walking around with all of their resentments stowed away in a figurative backpack that they carry around everywhere they go. It weighs so much that they're like a turtle with a shell that's ten times too big. Eventually they end up stuck on their back with arms and legs helplessly flailing around. Once completely incapacitated and suffering to a point that is no longer manageable, they are forced to do something about it. But by this time, they're already mentally, emotionally, and physically exhausted. They feel helpless and hopeless. Others are more like pressure cookers. They continuously stew in old hurts and resentments from the past until an explosion occurs. After the eruption they may feel better for a while, but it never lasts. The cycle starts over and before long the pressure has built up again, just waiting for another opportunity to explode.

Learning to forgive is not an easy task, however it is a skill that will prove to be very empowering and incredibly healing for you (and your partner). So whether you're like a turtle or a pressure cooker, these 5 steps will help you empty your 'backpack' and let go of old hurts from the past.

Step 1: Make the decision to forgive.

At some point in your life, you've likely told someone that you forgave them and genuinely meant it, but then your resentment returned and the feeling of forgiveness went away. This is normal. But if you want to achieve lasting forgiveness, you must make a solid decision to forgive, and that decision cannot fluctuate.

Let me give you an example. Let's say your spouse cheated on you. They genuinely regret the mistake, apologized and asked for forgiveness. You agree to grant a second chance, and in a moment of reconnection, you decide to forgive. Things are going well at first, but then doubts start creeping in. Every time he/she goes out, you question it. You feel insecure and constantly need reassurance that it won't happen again. When you have a fight, you bring up the affair. In other words, you have allowed your decision to forgive to fluctuate. And as a result, you are no longer enjoying a loving relationship with your spouse in the present moment.

Let me be clear about something... forgiveness does not mean you need to stay in relationships that are not working for you, nor does it mean that you should trust people who are not worthy of your trust. The truth is, you're not forgiving the other person because they deserve forgiveness, you're doing it because you deserve peace. So *if* you want to reconnect with your partner, then make the decision, commit to it, and do not give yourself permission to fluctuate from that decision.

Step 2: Get clear about it.

It may be easy enough to say: I forgive you, but from there to actually forgiving someone who has hurt you is a whole other matter. So once you've made a solid decision to forgive, it is time to get clear about it. At the top of a sheet of paper, write your partner's name. Next write what you are forgiving them for – be specific and thorough. Finally, on the back of the sheet, make a list of all of the reasons you want to forgive your partner. Once you've made a complete list, write the top three reasons on a post-it note and put it in a place you will see often throughout your daily life. Remember, if you do not know why you want to forgive, you will likely lose your commitment when the going gets tough. I also recommend keeping your full list handy so you can go back to it when you start feeling like a turtle or pressure cooker.

Step 3: Try adopting the other person's perspective.

No matter how confident a person may appear, there is no doubt that they have experienced traumatic events, losses, fears, and challenges at certain points along their journey. Unfortunately, these events often go unhealed and then show up in various forms later on in a person's life. This can explain, at least in part, why people behave in the ways that they do. Perhaps you cannot see any possible explanations for why your partner acted the way they did. However, if you're serious about forgiving them, you will need to consider the factors that may have contributed to their behaviour.

Step 4: Think of times when you acted similarly.

It is quite possible that you never did anything as bad to your partner as what was done to you, but you've no doubt hurt your partner at some point in your relationship. We've all done things we're not proud of and we've all been dishonest in various ways throughout our lives. While it is not healthy to focus on our mistakes and transgressions, it can be good to review them and remind ourselves that we're not perfect either and that there are times when we wanted and needed forgiveness. Take some time to write down all of the ways you've acted similarly.

Step 5: Forgive yourself.

If you're feeling guilty, ashamed or angry at yourself for things you've done in the past, you're not alone. Many believe that if others knew the "truth" about them - their dark side, disturbing

thoughts, all the bad things they've said and done, etc. that they wouldn't be worthy of love and connection. This belief is common and it causes many to create a false self and hide parts of themselves. This however requires a great deal of role-playing and is intensely energy consuming. When we withhold forgiveness from ourselves, it creates a great internal conflict that causes us to reject ourselves. This self-rejection is the worst form of self-violence and it creates a disconnection in all of our relationships. You may think it is your partner who is rejecting you, but first and foremost, it is YOU who is rejecting YOU. In many cases, your partner has not even had a chance to meet the real you! Therefore, complete steps 1 and 2 but with the focus on forgiving yourself - you may find it helpful to use the list that you created in Step 4.

When I encourage people to forgive, I usually hear every “but” in the book. But he did this, but she did that... And all these ‘buts’ may be true, **but** if you’re serious about freeing yourself up, you need to think and act differently than you ever have before. You need to take immediate and effective action to forgive your partner (and yourself).

About the Author:

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