

Forgiveness

Information Sheet



Forgiveness is a process where someone who has been wronged chooses to let go of their resentment, and treat the wrongdoer with compassion.

Deepening Understanding of Forgiveness

Forgiveness does not mean forgetting or condoning the wrongdoing, granting legal mercy, or reconciling a relationship. You can forgive a person while in no way believing that their actions were acceptable or justified.

On the other hand, simply saying the words “I forgive you”, or accepting an apology, is not forgiveness. In fact, forgiveness can occur without ever speaking to the wrongdoer. Forgiveness is an emotional change that occurs within the person who has been wronged.

What forgiveness is:

The decision to overcome pain that was inflicted by another person.

Letting go of anger, resentment, shame, and other emotions associated with an injustice, even though they are reasonable feelings.

Treating the offender with compassion, even though they are not entitled to it.

What forgiveness isn't:

Reconciliation (repairing or returning to a relationship).

Forgetting the injustice.

Condoning or excusing the offender's behavior.

Granting legal mercy to the offender.

“Letting go”, but wishing for revenge.

The Four Phases of Forgiveness

- 1 The Uncovering Phase.** During the first phase of forgiveness, you will improve your understanding of the injustice, and how it has impacted your life.
- 2 The Decision Phase.** During the second phase, you will gain a deeper understanding of what forgiveness is, and make the decision to choose or reject forgiveness as an option.
- 3 The Work Phase.** During the third phase, you will start to understand the offender in a new way, which will allow positive feelings toward the offender and yourself.
- 4 The Deepening Phase.** During the final phase of forgiveness, you will further decrease the negative emotions associated with the injustice. You may find meaning in the experiences, and recognize ways in which you have grown as a result.

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Uncovering Phase

During the **uncovering phase** of forgiveness, you will improve your understanding of the injustice, and how it has impacted your life. Use the journal prompts below to begin exploring.

Describe the injustices you have endured. What happened? Why was this treatment unfair?

How have the injustices affected you? Circle any of the examples that apply, and describe them in the box below. Feel free to add something else that isn't listed.

painful emotions
(e.g. anger or shame)

changed behavior
(e.g. avoiding new relationships)

practical costs
(e.g. time or money)

changed worldview
(e.g. "people are evil")

cognitive rehearsal
(recurring thoughts about injustice)

physical harm
(e.g. injuries from abuse)

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Decision Phase

During the **decision phase** of forgiveness, you will gain a deeper understanding of what forgiveness is, and make the decision to choose or reject forgiveness as an option.

Without looking at a definition, how would you describe forgiveness?

Many people struggle with the decision to forgive because they know that they have the right to be angry, while the offender does not have the right to kindness. Making the decision to forgive means letting go of these resentments—which you have every right to hold—so you can heal.

What are the pros and cons of deciding to forgive the person who wronged you?

Pros	Cons

Whether or not you've made the decision to forgive, describe how things might be different if you decide to do so. Be as specific as possible.

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Work Phase

During the **work phase** of forgiveness, you will start to understand the offender in a new way, which will allow positive feelings toward the offender and yourself.

Learning to understand the offender, and to see them as more than their wrongdoing, is an important part of forgiveness. However, it must be stressed that understanding does not mean condoning. One can understand another person without believing their actions are acceptable.

Respond to one of the following prompts:

- What was life like for the offender as they grew up? May this have impacted their behavior?
- What was life like for the offender at the time of the offense?

List the feelings you currently have toward the offender.

Did you list any positive feelings toward the offender? If so, describe them. If not, describe how your negative feelings have changed over time. Have they lessened?

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Deepening Phase

During the **deepening phase** of forgiveness, you will further decrease the negative emotions associated with the injustice. You may find meaning in the experiences, and recognize ways in which you have grown as a result.

How have you benefitted by forgiving the offender? Consider how forgiveness has affected your emotional health, behavioral changes that resulted from the injustice, and time/energy spent thinking about the offender.

Describe how you have grown because of injustice you endured and your efforts to forgive. How has your worldview changed? Are you stronger than you were before deciding to forgive?
