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Forgiveness and Letting Go - How to Achieve It

By Z. Hereford (<https://www.essentiallifeskills.net/about.html>)



The ability to achieve forgiveness and let go (<https://www.essentiallifeskills.net/forgivenessandlettinggoquotes.html>) of past hurts is one of the most critical challenges many of us face on the road to attaining personal peace and happiness.

While it certainly isn't easy, it is absolutely necessary for long-term mental and emotional health (<https://www.essentiallifeskills.net/emotionalhealth.html>).

Forgiveness can be defined as the decision to let go of resentment, anger, and thoughts of revenge as a result of a real, or perceived offense, hurt, or wrongdoing against you.

Forgiving someone does not mean denying a person's responsibility for hurting you, nor does it mean minimizing, or justifying the act. It does mean willing to forgive someone without condoning or excusing what they did, and then letting it go.

According to Dr. Robert Enright, a professor of educational psychology at the University of Wisconsin and a pioneer in the scientific study of forgiveness - forgiveness is a choice. It is the process of uncovering and letting go of anger (<https://www.essentiallifeskills.net/angermanagement.html>), while restoring hope and moving on with life. He writes:

"People, upon rationally determining that they have been unfairly treated, forgive when they willfully abandon resentment and related responses (to which they have a right) and endeavor to respond to the wrong doer based on the moral principle of beneficence, which may include compassion, unconditional worth, generosity and moral love (to which the wrong doer by nature of the hurtful act or acts, has no right.)"

In other words, while there is no question that we have the right to feel resentment and the desire to respond accordingly, we have the ability to make the choice not to. When we do, we refuse to play the role of the victim and we let go of the control and power that the offending person, or situation, has over us. We choose to not allow grudges, hurt or wrongdoings to define our lives.

How can we attain forgiveness and letting go?

✓ **Begin by acknowledging what hurt or offended you.** While denying the hurtful offence may be the first thing you may want to do, it is best to admit that it happened. Reflect upon it; take note how you reacted, and what it has done to your health and well-

being. Be able to articulate what was unacceptable about the situation.

✓ **Look for a broader perspective on what took place.** Make the attempt to understand the other person. Was the offense deliberate, or merely mindless and insensitive? Perhaps the person had no idea they hurt you, or was suffering from something themselves. Did they do it out of selfishness, recklessness, or were there other unknown circumstances at play? Sometimes going through the process of trying to understand the situation sheds new light on the matter and may lessen the hurtful response. It is also possible that you may have been oversensitive at the time. Hurt feelings are invariably subjective. Perhaps you were having a bad day; perhaps they were.

If you happen to know the hurtful act was deliberate, vicious and intended to harm you, then you may have to 'reframe' the situation. Reframing is a technique whereby you change the conceptual or emotional viewpoint from which you experience an event and put it in a different context or frame of reference. For instance, there are those who do harm to others thinking it will alleviate their own pain and distress. They lash out regardless of whom they are hurting, or how. Your ability to sort through a hurtful occurrence and put it into a different "framework" will prepare you to begin the process of forgiveness and letting it go.

✓ **Work through the emotions.** As well as acknowledging the event, acknowledge the anger, frustration and myriad emotions, but do not get stuck in them. Practice stress management techniques such as exercise, yoga, deep breathing, guided meditations, or anything else you find soothing and relaxing. Using cognitive strategies like writing in a journal, or talking to a wise friend or counselor, is also very beneficial.



In recent studies done on forgiveness coping strategies, it was found that men responded positively when it was presented as a challenge to them, and negatively when it involved emotion-focused coping. For women, however, it was found to be positively associated with emotion-focused coping and acceptance, and negatively associated with avoidance. Thus, based on these findings, if you're a man, it is more helpful to approach forgiveness as a challenge, or goal to accomplish. If you're a woman working on acceptance (<https://www.essentiallifefskills.net/acceptance.html>), understanding, and compassion may lead you there more successfully.

✓ **Commit towards letting go and moving on.** Remember first that the act of forgiving is more for your own benefit than anyone else's. Secondly, forgiveness and letting go take time, so be patient (<https://www.essentiallifefskills.net/patience.html>) with yourself. Certainly, it can be difficult to separate what you feel emotionally with what makes sense to do logically. However, if you commit to putting your energies on focusing on the benefits of forgiveness and letting go, you can more easily move forward with your life.

Letting go can be defined as: "A combination of accepting, but not denying; living in the present and looking forward to the future without regret for the past, and a willingness to move on and beyond."

Researchers and scientists have been discovering the health benefits of attaining forgiveness. Their studies have shown that serious mental, emotional and physical consequences can result from holding on to grudges and bitterness. Consequences such as depression, anxiety and the feeling that your life lacks meaning and purpose, as well as the loss of valuable connectedness with family and friends become high prices to pay for holding on to resentment.

✓ **Get Professional Help If You Need It.** If you find it too difficult to forgive and let go on your own, especially if the offending acts have been traumatic, or are ongoing, then consider working through your feelings and deeper issues with a good therapist. It would be more than worth your while to gain the peace of mind you seek and to move forward with your life.

The Benefits of Forgiveness and Letting Go

- Increased happiness and health with improved functioning of cardiovascular and nervous systems and less overall illnesses
- Restored positive thoughts, feelings, behaviors and promotes overall psychological well being
- Increased compassion, understanding and healing
- Reduced stress, anxiety, depression and chronic pain
- Lower risk of alcohol and substance abuse
- Ability to function better in career, education, work place
- Increases hope and optimism for the future

Ultimately, the act of forgiveness releases us from past hurts, memories and enslavement. Alternatively, to not forgive is to surrender oneself to the control of others and allow the present to be consumed by the past. If we choose not to forgive, we subject ourselves to the possibility of carrying anger, bitterness and resentment into future situations and relationships, as well as deprive ourselves of the peace of mind, health and happiness we deserve.

In the end, the best revenge is a life well lived (<https://www.essentiallifefskills.net/livingwell.html>)!

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