

**Forgiveness:**

Forgiveness is letting go; releasing oneself emotionally from a negative experience in one's life. The words may sound relatively easy, it's the actions of "giving up, releasing, and/or ceasing" that cause people the most difficulty. Forgiveness is **NOT** just about when others hurt us, it is also about when we have hurt someone else, including ourselves.

Let's start with forgiving others. How do we forgive? How do we let go of resentment? Most of the time we want/need to know that whoever caused us pain feels sorry for what they've done. We want them to admit that they did something wrong. We need them to acknowledge that they have hurt us. Notice that each of these statements are about the other person, not about you. It's all well and good when someone acknowledges their wrong-doing, however, we must still deal with the pain that they inflicted, and letting go of this pain is where true forgiveness resides.

Forgiveness is not global; it is about specific events and circumstances. I am not talking about constantly ignoring what other people do and pretending that it doesn't matter. That is **NOT** forgiveness; that is denial.

All too often people hold on to their hurt, anger, disappointment, &/or mistrust of others long after they've been hurt, betrayed or offended. These feelings will frequently interfere in relationships, not just with the injuring party, but with "innocent" people as well. This means that if you were the injured party and the event that hurt you is over, you're still carrying the scars and the burdens of the injury. In other words, you continue to suffer, and therefore, you are not free.

Take a moment and think about a time when someone hurt you. It needn't be a huge offense; perhaps someone said something thoughtless or hurtful, or someone was neglectful of your feelings or needs; maybe your boss overlooked you for a promotion; etc. Let's start with something small and manageable in the scheme of life. Think about how you felt at the time of the "injury". Today, sitting and thinking about this particular event, how strong is your feeling? Does your system still react as strongly today as it did when the event occurred? If you're still bothered by it, even moderately, then you need to do some forgiveness work. If your system has settled down, there is less work to do on this particular event.

Remember, letting go means that you can remember the offense, but it no longer stirs great emotion within you. It's the difference between relating a story, and reliving a story. As long as you relive the story, your entire system still carries the emotional burdens of the event, and this will wreak havoc upon your overall emotional, mental and physical well-being. So, today, you can choose to handle your hurts in ways that are healthier for you.

Before we move to new ways to handle your pain that's been inflicted by others, let's look at how you handle circumstances when you have been the injuring party. When you realize that you have done something to hurt someone, do you feel ashamed, angry, resentful, self-righteous? Do you attempt to minimize the other person's pain to minimize your own bad feelings. Do you judge the other person as too sensitive, or over reacting?

Think about a time when you hurt someone. No judgments, just awareness. We've all done things that were hurtful at some time in our lives. It may have been by accident, or carelessness; not out of maliciousness, but since all of us are human and therefore fallible, we've all done something that hurt someone else. Allow yourself to remember a time when someone felt hurt by you. These moments are often harder to recall because most people have a hard time admitting to them. Now is the time to acknowledge your humanness, and then you can move forward.

There is a process to forgiving yourself and others. It is one that requires your willingness to "let go" of your pain. It is a process that demands that you be honest with yourself so that you can move forward in your life without being burdened by your past. Forgiveness is not about forgetting, it is about learning and growing.