

Forgiveness

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During private conversations and in Support Group settings, caregivers sometimes talk about deep feelings of hurt and bitterness. These feelings are often associated with unkind remarks, undeserved judgement, being taken for granted, or being abused. The injury is usually close to the surface, even many years later, and we quickly become emotional when retelling the story of the incident as if the episode has just occurred. It becomes obvious that we have not healed from being wronged.

Forgiveness is important for a couple of reasons. First, few caregivers have the luxury of extra emotional energy to expend on replaying the incident over and over. Secondly, the person who has wronged us may not even be aware of our feelings. This may be a burden we alone feel, and as a result it may be increasing our stress and damaging our emotional and physical health.

Everett Worthington, a researcher at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, has developed an interesting procedure to guide us through the healing process of forgiving.

REACH Forgiveness of Others

www.evworthington-forgiveness.com/reach-forgiveness-of-others/

R – Recall the hurt. To heal, you have to face the fact that you’ve been hurt. Make up your mind not to be nasty, not to treat yourself like a victim, and not to treat the person as a jerk. Make the decision to forgive. Decide that you are not going to pursue payback.

E – Empathize with your partner. Empathy is putting yourself in the other person’s chair. Pretend that the other person is in an empty chair across from you. Talk to him. Pour your heart out. Then, when you’ve had your say, sit in his chair. Talk back to the imaginary you in a way that helps you see why the other person might have wronged you. This builds empathy, and, even if you can’t empathize, you might feel more sympathy, compassion, or love, which helps you heal from hurt. This allows you to give an ...

A – Altruistic gift. Giving forgiveness is an unselfish, altruistic gift. We all can remember when we wronged someone—maybe a parent, teacher, or friend—and the person forgave us. We felt light and free. And we didn’t want to disappoint that person by doing wrong again. By forgiving unselfishly, you can give that same gift to someone who hurt you.

C – Commit. Once you’ve forgiven, write a note to yourself – something as simple as, “Today, I forgave (person’s name) for hurting me.” This helps your forgiveness last.

H – Hold onto forgiveness. We write notes of commitment because we will almost surely be tempted to doubt that we really forgave. We can re-read our notes. We did forgive.

Most importantly, we need to forgive ourselves. For all the things that didn’t get done, the things that weren’t done as well as we would have liked, for the negative self-talk, for the failures, for the unintended sharp words, for wanting out, for being unable to speak up for ourselves, for longing for the life we thought we would have ... we feel that we are undeserving of forgiveness. A separate 6-step process for forgiving ourselves can be found at www.evworthington-forgiveness.com/six-steps-to-forgiving-yourself. If you are not online, perhaps someone at the library could print this for you.

Forgiving doesn’t mean that we won’t still feel the hurt of being wronged, but it does mean that it won’t overshadow all the good aspects of our lives.