Brought to you by H & H Health Associates

February 2020

The Power of Forgiveness

Forgiving someone who has hurt you deeply — a parent, sibling, spouse, ex-spouse, employer, or even a stranger — is one of the most difficult challenges you'll face in life.

Until you can forgive, anger, resentment, and bitterness will continue to eat away at your heart and mind, causing emotional and even physical damage because of increased stress.

"Not forgiving means you carry in your heart the pain the person has caused you," says Kathleen Griffin, author of The Forgiveness Formula: How to Let Go of Your Pain and Move on With Life. "Not letting go of this burden can keep you trapped in the past and unable to move forward into a better future."

People who have been deeply hurt often say there's a "before" and "after" the hurt occurred. They remember the time before the hurt as one without problems, and withholding forgiveness becomes a way of trying to go back to how things used to be.

"But to begin the journey of forgiveness, you need to give up hope of things being as they were before the hurt occurred," says Ms. Griffin. "Your life is different, and accepting that what happened to you really did occur, but that you can forgive and let go of the pain it caused, is the first step."

Lighten your load

Did You Know?

You have access to hundreds of tools to help you improve every relationship in your life, from your partner to your children to your coworkers.

Log-in to explore these resources...

Choosing to forgive — and it is a choice — can make a significant difference in your peace of mind and future happiness.

"Think of people you know who can forgive," says Ms. Griffin. "Now think of those who bear a grudge. Which camp would you rather be in?"

To imagine the difference forgiveness could make in your life, think about a time when you took a trip and packed too much. Remember how grateful you were to put down your bags and not have to carry them anymore?

"Your forgiveness issues are just the same," says Ms. Griffin. "You may not be conscious of carrying them every day, but they weigh you down just the same. Imagine letting go of the burden of your resentment and anger, and think about how much easier your life journey would be."

Practice forgiveness

Make two lists: an "easy" list of people who have not done you a great wrong but with whom you still have issues, and a "hard" list of those who have hurt you deeply. Begin by working to forgive the people on the easy list first.

"Forgiveness doesn't mean forgetting what was done to you, but it does mean completely letting go of the hurt someone has caused you, because you have decided to do so," says Ms. Griffin. "Forgiveness is never about the other person. It's all about you and your decision to live a less painful and more liberated life."

Writing in a forgiveness journal can help. In the journal, note how you feel about forgiveness and where you are in the process.

Other ideas

Meditate to help center and calm your spirit. Sit quietly with your eyes closed and become conscious of your breathing.

Take "life breaths" to help you cope with negative emotions. Choose a word that describes your feelings, such as anger, fear, or hate. As you take a deep, slow breath in through your nose, imagine you're breathing in the opposite words: hope, love, or peace. Now slowly and deeply breathe out through your mouth, breathing out the fear, anger, and hate.

Visualize a forgiveness room. Imagine a room deep within your heart. The room contains all the bitterness and sadness of not forgiving. Open that room, clean it, and little by little, make it a part of yourself again so that no part of your heart is shut down.

"As the years pass, you may have people who seem beyond your power to forgive," says Ms. Griffin. "But you always have a choice: Do I choose to hold on to bitterness or to forgive? To forgive is to say, 'It stops here. With me.'"

Krames Staywell, LLC © 2020