



Forgiveness is Not What You Think – Learn It!

Forgiveness is a learned skill and an ongoing daily process without a beginning or endpoint. It is a powerful statement to you and the world that you are going to live your life on your terms, and no one person or situation is going to take that away from you. It is the tipping point of healing in that you cannot create the necessary shift in your brain to move on without letting go of the past,

The sequence of becoming angry is:

- Circumstance or person who has wronged you (real or perceived)
- Blame
- Victim
- Anger

Anger is so powerful that no one **ever** wants to let it go. Becoming aware of your unwillingness to move on is the first and most critical step. Being a victim is a strong role, and it helps you *feel* safe, whether you are or not. You are never going to wake up one day and feel that you want to give it up. You must keep making an ongoing choice to forgive.



The next step is becoming aware you are in a victim role. There are many disguises. Unfortunately, the hyper-vigilant neurochemical state manifested by anger, shuts down the rational frontal cortex. Anger, which is part of the process, also blocks access to being open to treatment and healing.

You then have to decide whether you want to remain in this role or move. There is no magic or shortcuts. It is a simple intellectual choice of, “I don’t want to continue being a victim.”

What forgiveness is not

The most common context that forgiveness is considered is in a religious sense. It is fine to look at it through that lens but it is much deeper. It is easy to look at the situation with expected your reaction to “accept” what happened or the person who wronged you. You do not have to do that. That is also fine but not necessary. You do not have to twist your mind around a situation that might be deplorable. It borders on denial, which is dangerous because it actually keeps your whole nervous systems fired up. Repressed emotions are a major threat and can cause serious disease. What is necessary to feel, acknowledge the deep wound, use the tools of your choice to let go, move on and take back your life. Why do you want a person you intensely dislike occupy space in your brain and compromise the quality of your day?

It is also important to process the deepest wounds. It is easier to create a façade of forgiveness with ongoing letting go of little things (is also helpful), but what about forgiving the bully at school or work who continues to torment you? Again, acceptance is not that helpful in many of these types of situations. Paradoxically, forgiveness in this situation frees up energy that often allows you to creatively solve the problem.

What is forgiveness

At the most basic level, it is simply making a decision to take full responsibility for every aspect of your life, let go of anger and hate, and free yourself up to move forward. Chronic pain is challenging in that you are being constantly bombarded with unpleasant sensory input. It is hard to create the “space” to heal when you are under attack, but critical to pull it off. Essentially anyone who makes a focused and determined effort can accomplish it.

It is critical to understand that forgiveness is ongoing process that you will utilize every day and multiple times per day indefinitely. It is a learned skill that does improve with time.



Methods of forgiveness

There are many ways of accomplishing forgiveness. Most of this I have learned from Dr. Fred Luskin, who is a friend of mine and author of *Forgive for Good*. (1) Some suggestions include:

- Understand how detrimental it is to hold on to the past and not live in the present. Dr. Luskin calls this scenario “renting too much space in your mind.”
- Just “let go.” Is this person or situation worth disrupting your day and peace of mind?
- Reframe the situation. Make a choice not to view yourself as a victim and look at challenges as opportunities.
- Cultivate awareness—just being aware of your anger can dissolve it. Especially when you realize that it exists only within you.
- Identify your grievance stories—Dr. Luskin also makes the observation that if you tell the same story more than three times where you are the victim, you have a “grievance story.”
 - This is particularly relevant when suffering from chronic pain when it really was someone else’s fault. How long do you want that person or employer to run your life? They are not worth your time.
- “The unenforceable rules”—There are many situations and people in life that you wish would be different, but you have no control or say. It is fine to want a better scenario, but when that wish turns into a mental demand, it is problematic. Spending time being upset about things you have no control over is a complete waste of time.
- Have compassion—I mention this gingerly because this step is difficult and not mandatory to move on. However, if you can develop deep compassion for someone who has wronged you, your life will change, and you really will be free. Most people, including me, can’t achieve this without professional help. What about compassion for you?
- This is particularly relevant when suffering from chronic pain when it really was someone else’s fault. How long do you want that person or employer to run your life? They are not worth your time.

Please just don’t read this list. Forgiveness is a learned skill that won’t improve unless you use and practice it – a lot. This rest stop will be a place to return to as a resource to review the tools and approaches that are the most effective for you.

References:

1. Luskin, Dr. Fred. *Forgive for Good*. Harper One, New York, 2003.