

# Forgiveness

## And Your Health

### How to Let Go of a Grudge

...and be healthier *and* happier



When we are hurt emotionally, our first reactions are anger and a desire to get even with the person who inflicted the pain. We want the people who hurt us to suffer...while a willingness to forgive them is viewed as weakness.

But forgiveness is a powerful, courageous act that can ultimately be of great benefit to you and to those who are close to you.

#### BENEFITS OF FORGIVING

People who forgive those who inflict psychological pain on them reap huge emotional rewards. They have less hostility and anxiety and have a better chance of suffering fewer stress-related health problems.

When you forgive, you also become more hopeful about the future and your self-esteem rises.

By contrast, nursing a grudge takes an emotional toll. People who fail to forgive are prone to depression, and the more resentment they harbor, the more depressed they are likely to become.

The stress of resentment also takes a physical toll. Forgiveness is a release of the anxieties that put unhealthy strains on one's body.

**Example:** In one recent study, volunteers were instructed to think about an emotional injury that was done to them. Then they were asked to imagine getting even with the perpetrator. Their pulses accelerated and their blood pressures rose. When they were told to imagine empathizing with the offender, their signs of stress softened significantly.

#### INSULT AND INJURY

Virtually everyone has difficulty releasing themselves from feelings of resentment and anger. Questions to

ask yourself to determine your willingness to forgive...

- How angry do you become when you are mistreated?
- Are you still angry now about being hurt recently?
- How much time and energy do you think you spend every day thinking about it?
- Are you preoccupied with seeking revenge for emotional mistreatment?

When the hurt we feel is substantial, the act of forgiving is a lengthy process.

To initiate the healing process, you must admit that you feel hurt...and that you understand what it means to forgive.

#### PREPARING TO FORGIVE

Many people find it hard to accept the reality of the injury they have suffered. It takes humility—and real courage—to acknowledge that someone had power over you that enabled him/her to hurt you deeply.

We resist forgiving because we misunderstand what forgiveness involves. Many of us think it means being a wimp—letting the other person “off the hook”—and inviting more mistreatment.

Forgiveness is purely an internal action—giving up feelings of resentment to which you're entitled and offering compassionate understanding to someone who may not deserve it.

Letting go of a grudge is an exercise in personal power, not weakness. It puts you in control, not at the mercy of

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others. Forgiving someone doesn't condone or excuse what he has done. By forgiving, you're not sheepishly accepting the action inflicted on you.

You don't need to forget about the mistreatment or pretend that the offense never happened. You don't have to allow the person who hurt you back into your confidence, your circle of friends or your home. You can forgive and still make the wise decision not to trust the offender or even to see him again.

### TAKING ACTION

Once you have decided that you really want to forgive, these exercises will help further the process...

- **Imagine what it was like for the offender when he was growing up.** What mistreatment, deprivation and pain might have created the inner turmoil that led to his malicious action? Thinking about the person's past will plant the seed of empathy in your mind.

- **Put the offense in perspective.** Ask yourself what was happening in the person's life at the time of his offense. Acts that cause pain to others are often committed when the perpetrator is under temporary stress or pressure.

- **Accept the person as a human being.** You don't need to think of him as virtuous but as someone who, despite mistakes, has intrinsic worth because he is a human being.

- **Accept your pain, and let go.** In addition to accepting the offending person as truly human, you must feel free of negative energy rather than turning it into rage and fury. If you remain angry, the hostility will reverberate through all your relationships. When we're angry, we can't help but inflict pain on children, spouses, close friends and coworkers. ■