



Divisions of Forgiveness -

One important factor in all of this is that *all forgiveness is not equal*. In other words some things are way easier to forgive than others. One way to look at this is to consider that there is a hierarchy of forgiveness. To illustrate, think about the difference between forgiving someone for breaking your umbrella vs. forgiving them for wrecking your brand new car. Or think about what is involved with forgiving someone for bumping into you causing you to drop your drink as compared with forgiving someone who waited outside for you and then physically assaulted you and stole your wallet. In each case, forgiveness is part of the healing process, however the act of forgiveness in each case comes easier in some situations than in others.

So in order to increase insight into the concept of forgiveness, let's break it down some basic categories. Keep in mind that these categories are just general guidelines as individually, all of us look at forgiveness through our own personal unique lens of our values and experiences.

1 - BASIC – If you aren't letting these situations quickly pass with time then you have a serious forgiveness problem.

These things may be irritating at first but soon should be easier to forgive once you calm down and think clearly:

- Someone makes an honest mistake and you can discern that no bad intentions were meant (“No harm, no foul”)
- You are the victim of a simple misunderstanding
- The person who wronged you has legitimate reasons why they deserve a pass (He or she may be going through tough times – “Jane has been preoccupied with her father’s cancer so I can overlook the fact that she wasn’t too friendly when I tried to say hello to her the other day”)
- You can admit to yourself that you maybe had it coming because of your own past behavior – “I have been pretty mean to Johnny at school for the past few months so I can see why he didn’t invite me to his party”
- You can conclude that in the bigger scheme of things: Its simply not worth it to stay mad – (“Don’t sweat the small stuff”)

2 - MODERATE – These issues can be harder. The hurt may be a little deeper than surface level or the objectionable action may have been in a more sensitive life area, however with a little extra effort you can still move on and let go.

- Someone disappointed you in a way where the feelings still linger
- The person clearly wronged you but apologized, however it still stings
- The person wronged and you just can’t stop thinking about it
- The person was highly insensitive even it wasn’t deliberate

3 - DIFFICULT – Serious effort may be involved with letting go. There may be legitimate evidence that someone wronged or hurt you or treated you unjustly. It may have even been on purpose.

- Your values were triggered- The person clearly put down something or someone important to you- (family, your career, etc.)
- A person who wronged you has a repeated pattern of offending (Which may be causing a buildup) – Being repeatedly teased or bullied for example
- It appears the person made a deliberate attempt to hurt, insult you or otherwise slander or defame your character or the reputation of someone close to you
- Broken loyalty: Someone whom you put your trust in deliberately let you down or betrayed your trust with regard to something important.
- Someone keeps doing something hurtful or offensive even after you have spoken to them about it clearly and assertively.

4 - LONG TERM/TRAUMATIC* – Deep pain that can last for years. Profound emotional scars.

- You or someone you care about was abused, victimized or exploited *Traumatic areas can be extremely difficult to discuss so no one is required to share anything in this area unless they are comfortable



GROUP EXERCISE – Starting to Let Go

Directions:

1. Everyone in the group should get a pen and a piece of paper. Tear the paper into 4 smaller pieces. On each paper write about something that hurt you. It can be something recent or something older. It can be something basic or something deeper. If you are not comfortable sharing something at this time, do not include it. Write as clearly and legibly as possible. (If this is a newer group it may not be a good idea to get into more traumatic areas at first. If this is a more cohesive and trusting group, perhaps the group is ready – Discuss this first with the counselor)
2. When everyone is done, the counselor or group leader should collect the papers and put them in one pile.
3. Discuss the following rules before sharing and discussing anything further:
 - a. **RULE #1 - Strive to be positive, encouraging and understanding** – The goal of this exercise is to help one another not hurt anyone even more so please keep this in mind at all times.
 - b. **RULE #3 - Choose your words carefully when expressing yourself - Do not trivialize or make fun of anyone's pain or hurt.** Saying “that’s stupid” or “How could this bother anyone?” is insensitive – Use empathy - Try to put yourself in the other person’s shoes even if you do not feel the same way personally.
4. Process this activity by picking a paper from the pile one person at a time: Read what is on the paper and answer the following:
 - a. **Did this ever happen to you?** If you are comfortable, share your story briefly. If it did not happen to you, use your imagination:
 - i. What did you do? (Or if this did not happen to you what do you think you would do?)
 - ii. Who or what helped you to move on? (Or who or what do you think could help you?)
5. ***After each paper is read and discussed, tear it up and throw it away to symbolize letting go. At the end of the group any remaining papers should be torn up and thrown away as well.***

