



i4Give
Day

Why Forgiveness?



Why Forgiveness?

Before we look at the benefit of forgiving, it is good to establish the different kinds of forgiveness, mainly decisional vs. emotional.

Decisional forgiveness is a rational choice coming from the head, involving a logical decision to let go of resentment towards the offender. This kind of forgiveness, however, is only cognitive; it does not reach the heart. Deep inside, the resentment and hostility could still be there and would only be resolved when there's emotional forgiveness, when the person has fully and truly let go of what had happened.

When we forgive by decision and with emotion, the anger and resentment we feel against the offender dissipates. These once negative emotions are ideally replaced with compassion and empathy. You may choose to no longer associate with the person who hurt you because of your desire for emotional safety, but it does not mean that you continue to harbor negative feelings for them. This is commonly referred to as emotional forgiveness.

Forgiving is not condoning the offense.

Mental health professionals support the belief that fully forgiving someone who wronged us does not mean excusing or forgetting the offense. It also does not necessarily mean reconciling with the offender or going back into the same abusive relationship. Moreover, we could forgive and still seek compensation or even justice for what has been done to us.

Forgiveness is being mindful of the hurt done to us, recognizing its effects on our lives, and deciding emotionally and intellectually to let go of our desire for revenge, and our feelings of resentment against the offender.

The benefits of forgiveness

However, no matter how hard the process of forgiveness can be, it seems that it would be best for us to put effort towards forgiving those who wronged us. Mental health professionals have reached this conclusion based upon research studies done on the beneficial effects of forgiveness in our lives. Research findings support the theory that holding on to bitterness and resentment can affect our health, scientists have also found that the act of forgiveness itself has many benefits. Some of these benefits include:

Forgiveness lowers stress levels...

When one truly forgives, one lets go of negative emotions – the fear of the offender, the anger and hatred that always bubble up whenever thoughts of the event surface – that can affect us physically. Without these negative emotions, our stress level is lowered significantly, reducing the risk of developing cardiovascular and other diseases.

...and improves our relationships with others.

Other people are driven away from us when we seem to have a grudge against the world. This can happen when there are unresolved issues because negative emotions tend to poison our relationships with others. On the other hand, those who are forgiving will attract people to themselves, and having a strong social support system is always good for one's emotional and mental health.

Forgiveness also extends life.

Studies have shown that people who are more forgiving live longer. They are happier and more hopeful and generally score higher on measures of psychological well-being.

Indeed, mental health professionals seem to agree that forgiveness is healthier for everyone. We all know it is not easy to do, especially when the offender is a friend or a family member. Anyone who has ever tried forgiving knows it is not an easy task. However, when the time is right and you are willing, forgiveness is a skill that we can study, practice, and eventually implement in our own lives.

If you need to learn how to forgive, let us know. We can help you.