

CONNECTIONS

A NEWSLETTER ABOUT FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS & PERSONAL GROWTH

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"Every man (and woman) should keep a fair-sized cemetery in which to bury the faults of his (or her) friend."

Henry Ward Beecher

PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS

10 Tips on Forgiving

Taken from an article by Victor Parachin
<http://www.sober.org/ForgVict.html>



1 Educate your self about forgiveness.

Understanding how others forgive helps one understand how to forgive.

2 Spend a few minutes each day cleaning out your thinking.

At a local florist shop I once watched the owner remove tiny bugs from a potted plant. Using a cotton swab he meticulously plucked off one small tenaciously clinging offender after another. Although that tedious process took him several hours of silent concentration and steady work, he was able to rid the plant of what would ultimately stunt its growth and ruin its loveliness. There is a lesson from that florist which applies to daily living. The only way to keep ourselves free from the infestation of troublesome thoughts is to spend a few minutes each day cleaning out our thinking.

3 Practice on small hurts.

To become a generous forgiver of major pains, practice forgiveness on small hurts. Forgive immediately the small slights inflicted by strangers - a rude clerk, a driver who cut you off, a doctor who keeps you waiting and waiting, etc. Use those events as practice time to prepare you for the tougher task of forgiving major hurts.

4 Challenge the "shoulds" in your thinking.

Forgiveness is much easier when you give up the irrational belief which fuels your frustration, anger, and

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hostility—the expectation that other people will always act in the way you want. Beware of the “shoulds” in your thinking and speaking:

- He shouldn’t have done this to me.
- My daughter should have known better.
- I’ve worked hard and I should have been rewarded.
- She shouldn’t act that way.
- My son should be more attentive to me.

5 Understand that resentment has a high price tag.

Resentment has been shown to increase physical and mental health symptoms.

6 Remember: Lack of forgiveness is giving others power over you.

Withholding forgiveness and nursing resentment simply allow another person to have control over your well-being. It is always a mistake to let such negative emotions influence your living. Forgive, and you will be able to direct your life in positive thoughts and actions.

7 Recognize the ripple effect of harboring a grudge.

When you can’t forgive someone, there can be a ripple effect which negatively infects your family and friends.

8 Bury the grudge—literally.

Write a letter to the person who hurt you, but don’t mail it. Express fully, clearly and honestly how you feel and why that person’s act hurt you and made you angry. Conclude with the bold declaration that you have forgiven him or her. Then, bury the letter in a potted plant or somewhere in your yard. This is a powerful symbolic exercise which many people have found to be extremely therapeutic.

9 Try instant forgiveness.

Sometimes forgiving in the moment, with no thought can save a person from years of resentment.

10 Recall repeatedly this one vital fact: forgiveness is a gift you give yourself.

A former inmate of a Nazi concentration camp was visiting a friend who shared the ordeal with him.

“Have you forgiven the Nazis?” he asked his friend.

“Yes.”

“Well, I haven’t. I’m still consumed with hatred for them,” the other man declared.

“In that case,” said his friend gently, “they still have you in prison.”

That story points out this reality: ultimately, forgiveness is a gift you give yourself. Bitterness and anger imprison you emotionally. Forgiveness sets you free.

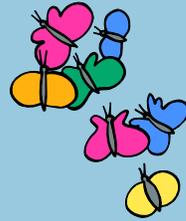


Extension Spotlight

Deanna Sweat

Deanna Sweat started working in 1988, as a program assistant in Jewell County, until the FCS agent position was “unfrozen” in 1989, at which time she assumed FCS and shared 4-H programming responsibilities. On July 1, 2005, her position evolved into the Post Rock Extension District agent with an emphasis on family life. Deanna has a bachelor’s degree in human ecology education from K-State, having graduated in 1986 after returning to college in her mid-30’s to complete her degree. She cites the support of her ‘wonderful’ husband, Loren, and three children who were in kindergarten, 4th, and 8th grades at the time as making this huge accomplishment possible.

In 1998, the Extension FCS Program Development Committee, with Deanna’s assistance, organized a county health fair which provided an array of health “checks” (blood tests, vision, hearing spine, cardiac, diabetic, skin cancer, car seat safety). With numerous agencies and professionals working together, it has been a very popular annual event that attracts several hundred individuals. At this year’s evaluation meeting, the idea to target health-related issues, specifically of youth, emerged. With expedient planning, the first youth health all-day fair for 7-12th grade students in Jewell County has already happened which featured workshops on breast, testicular, & skin cancers, underage drinking, seat belt safety, consequences of teen sex, positive self image/ depression/ suicide, tobacco awareness, drug-related issues, nutrition, and exercise. These nine sessions were taught by area professionals from Kansas Highway Patrol, local doctor’s office, Pawnee Mental Health, Heartbeat Pregnancy Center, KBI, and hospital dietetics department. Plans were for an every-other-year event, but the enormous amount of positive praise from students, school administrators, teachers, parents, and everyone involved led to a date already being set for 2006. Deanna also notes that she enjoys working with Jewell County Resource Council, county commer-



“I enjoy working with many agencies, organizations, and individuals to be a resource and active partner in addressing issues and concerns.”

Deanna Sweat

cial development, Jewell County FCE (family community education), 4-H Council, and county fair board.

On a more personal note, Deanna and her husband will celebrate their 35th wedding anniversary on January 2, 2006. They live on a dryland farm near Kackley, also having a small cow-calf operation. Loren served in the Navy, stationed on a LST in Viet Nam. Their son, Paul, works as a warehouse supervisor for United Agriculture Products, a chemical company, and will soon be transferred to Concordia. Their daughter, Cynthia, is a graphic designer at Brush Art Company and lives in Downs with her husband, Shawn Schweitzer, and 11-month old son, Mattox (“our adorable grandson”). Lynda, the youngest child, has completed cabinet-making at NCKTC in Beloit and lives in Topeka with her husband, Tim High. Besides family, Deanna enjoys genealogy, yard work, flowers, gardening, sewing, cooking and photography. Her immediate goal is to “become more efficient as a district extension agent in the delivery of K-State Research and Extension services and programs to clientele of all ages.”



PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT



Learning to Forgive Yourself

By Jean Lawrence, Reviewed by Brunilda Nazario, MD

Originally based on the article found at

<http://www.webmd.com/content/Article/61/71415.htm?printing=true>

We all mess up sometimes. So why is forgiving yourself a lot harder than forgiving others?

Your heart and mental health may depend on your ability to reduce hurt and anger, even at yourself. So effective is forgiveness—if we could find a way to learn and teach it—that Stanford University is undertaking a project to learn how forgiveness can enhance health and relationships and even prevent disease.

But first, you might have to forgive yourself. Did you cheat on your spouse? Hit a child in anger? Steal something? Go off the wagon? The list of potential human misdeeds is long.

If someone else did these things, you might learn to forgive them or at least let go of the anger. That's because it's easier to forgive others. After all, they don't live in your head, reading you the same old riot act. All the world's major religions preach the power of forgiveness. But forgiveness is such an elusive act, quicksilver in its ability to be strongly felt one moment and then dart away beyond reach the next.

According to Stanford's call for volunteer subjects, the definition of forgiveness is a simple one, not a near-impossible requirement that a person apply for sainthood. "Forgiveness," it says, "consists primarily of taking less personal offense, reducing anger, and the blaming of the offender, and developing an increased understanding of situations that lead to hurt and anger."

When You Need to Try to Forgive Yourself

Sharon A. Hartman, LSW, a clinical trainer at the Caron Foundation, a drug and alcohol treat-

ment center in Wernersville, PA, deals with the need to forgive every day. "These are such shame-based diseases," she says. "Forgiving oneself is the more difficult part of recovery."

A chronic state of anger and resentment interferes with life, Hartman points out. Countless studies also show stress and anger can cause or worsen diseases, such as cancer, heart disease, and various autoimmune disorders. "When resentment is interfering with your life, it's time to forgive yourself," she says. "So many people have a constant, critical voice in their heads narrating their every move." She says she calls her critical voice 'Gertrude' and tries to counteract Gertrude's eternal litany with positive affirmations—that she is getting better, that she is less angry. Hartman adds, "Forgiving doesn't mean not being angry with yourself, but not hating yourself. No one can beat us up better than we beat ourselves up."



Forgiving Requires Specificity

"I think people often try to forgive themselves for the wrong things," says Joretta L. Marshall, PhD, a United Methodist minister and professor of pastoral care at the Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis. "We think we ought to forgive ourselves for being human and making human mistakes. People don't have to forgive themselves for being who they are... Forgiveness means being specific about what we did that needs forgiving."

Learning to Forgive Yourself

"I think forgiveness is often confused with condoning or lack of accountability," Hartman says. "This is a world with high performance



standards. People think they need to be perfect. Yet people do things—intended or not—that hurt others. You may not intend to harm, but the other person is no less hurt.” That’s when you need to stop at some point and forgive yourself.

Hang on to Resentment Can Have Advantages

“It’s about relinquishing a source of pain and letting go of resentment. People think forgiving yourself means you are letting yourself get away with whatever it was you did,” Hartman goes on. “The pain and anger you are feeling are supposed to be your punishment.”



People want to feel pain and resentment? “Oh,” exclaims Hartman, “resentment is a very attractive way of putting a barrier around yourself as protection against being hurt again.”



Do You Need a Therapist?

If toting around self-loathing like a heavy backpack has advantages, how do you set it down?

It can be done without formal therapy, Marshall says. “But not without community of some kind. It is in the context of our relationships (whether with therapists, pastors, counselors, religious groups, families, and friends) that we experience the grace of being forgiven and forgiving others.” Grace, of course, is a peace of mind bestowed regardless of whether we deserve it or not. “You need to talk to someone as a rule,” Hartman says.

How Do You Know You Have Forgiven Yourself?

You picked the wrong mate and the kids suffered neglect. You spread a story that got someone fired. You didn’t report a crime and others were victimized. Is talking to a therapist and declaring yourself forgiven enough? “You know you have done it when the memory gives you no more pain or anger,” Hartman says. “It’s as simple

as that. You can say, ‘I am free of this.’”

Of course, along with this often goes the need to ask the wronged person to forgive you as well. “Forgiveness,” Marshall notes, “is never complete unless people and relationships are transformed in the process.” That transformation, of course, could involve never repeating the action.

Writing on this subject in *Selfhelp Magazine*, Richard B. Patterson, PhD, a clinical psychologist in El Paso, Texas, says, “Making amends is more than a simple ‘I’m sorry.’ It involves a willingness to listen to another person’s hurt. It involves a willingness to take immediate corrective action.” He says, however, that if disclosure would harm the other person (“I am sorry I slept with your husband. Oh, you didn’t know?”) you need to find another way to make amends indirectly, even by praying for the person.

Hartman likens the sequence, if done properly, to a technique her husband used to correct a problem with his computer. He didn’t want to lose data, so someone told him to set the clock back to before the problem occurred. This way, he lost the mistake, but not the data in the memory. That’s what forgiving yourself is — you don’t forget the mistake, but it doesn’t cause any trouble and you don’t lose the memory of it.



A New Day

Forgiving yourself isn’t a slogging, long-term, “good day / bad day” type of thing, Marshall says. “At some point,” she says, “you reach a turning point. Something shifts. You feel less burdened, you have more energy. You live longer, you have better health.”

“We all screw up sometime,” Hartman says. “Forgiving ourselves is as close as we come to a system reset button.”

Forgiveness: Spiritual & Medical Implications

by Christina M. Puchalski, MD

in the *The Yale Journal for Humanities in Medicine*

<http://info.med.yale.edu/intmed/hummed/yjhm/spirit/forgiveness/cpuchalski.htm>

On a societal level, we face social injustice, urban crime, terrorist acts and war. These realities of society can also lead to resentment, territorialism and hatred. While many of these aspects of our society are wrong and perhaps even warrant a justifiable anger and hatred until we can forgive even the most horrendous of these acts, how can we as a society, or as a civilization, live together in peace? Thus, forgiveness is the basic building block of a tolerant society. There have been many studies looking at the role of forgiveness in health. Unforgiving persons have increased anxiety symptoms, increased paranoia, increased narcissism, increased frequency of psycho-somatic complications, increased incidence of heart disease and less resistance to physical illness. Others have found that people who are unable to forgive themselves or others also have an increased incidence of depression and callousness toward others. The act of forgiveness can result in less anxiety and depression, better health outcomes, increased coping with stress, and increased closeness to a spiritual being and others.

There have been numerous studies looking at forgiveness interventions. The interventions involved counseling and exercises which were used to help people move from anger and resentment towards forgiveness. In one study, incest survivors who experienced the forgiveness intervention had at the end of the intervention increased abilities to forgive others, increased hopefulness and decreased levels of anxiety and depression. In another study, college students were randomized to a group that received a forgiveness education program and another group who studied human relations. The group that received the forgiveness education program showed higher levels of hope and an increased willingness to forgive others. This greater self-forgiveness was associated with increased self-esteem, lower levels of anxiety, lower levels of depression and a more positive view of their patient.

In many of these studies, it was shown that people who are able to forgive are more likely to have better interpersonal functioning and therefore social support. In terms of social support, there is a large body of literature that demonstrated the value of social support. Social support has been shown to reduce cardiovascular risks, promote faster recovery and increased survival rates from several types of cancer. Therefore, forgiveness, since it improved interpersonal functioning, might mediate these better health outcomes through the ability of people to have increased social support.

Thus, the act of forgiving from a research end seems to indicate that forgiveness can improve personal, interpersonal, and societal well-being.



FROM THE DESK OF

Charlotte Shoup Olsen



FORGIVENESS in 2006!

As we move into 2006, making New Year's resolutions often comes into focus. This issue on forgiveness may give you some information to share with your county or district constituents as we think about our hopes and dreams for changes in the new year.

Also, I want to add a big thank you to Karen Elliott, Denise Sullivan, Gayle Price, Libby Curry, and Linda Walter for volunteering to host the national satellite conference titled "The Impact of Couple and Marital Relationships on Parenting and Child Out-

comes" that was held in early December. Thank you to those agents and their community collaborators who participated at one of these sites or on their own.

More agents are anticipating viewing the two-part program after we receive the taped version. Hopefully this program will generate long term program planning discussion around the integration of parenting and couple relationship education.

Charlotte Shoup Olsen, Ph.D.
W. Jared DuPree, M.S.

Answers to Questions from Kansas County Extension Agents

Question:

What are some suggestions for transitioning into a district agent position with a specialization in family life education?

Answer:

As you know, Daryl Buchholz has been focusing on specialization issues in the *Tuesday Letter*. I might add that if it requires 'specialized' training to help you feel more comfortable in family life education, especially if you have focused on other areas in your former county position, please take note of this 2006 event. Upcoming is the "Annual Family Life Electronic Seminar Series" produced by Ohio State University in which you might be interested.

Each participant views and listens to on-line PowerPoint presentations from each presenter and later "dialogues" with them and other professionals from across the nation during this 2-week on-line presentation. The topic this year is on research and programming in relationship and marriage education from state specialists on the *National Extension Relationship and Marriage Education Network*. For more information on registering, go to

<http://hec.osu.edu/eseminars>

There are also archives from other years in which other family life education issues have been addressed.