

Worksheet 4.9 Forgiveness Letter Instructions

Think of a person from your past who you are holding a grudge against or have been in conflict with. How is this grudge affecting you? How is it affecting the other person? Those who study forgiveness have discovered that forgiving does not mean forgetting, condoning, pardoning, or excusing the transgression and the goal of forgiveness is not necessarily reconciliation (Enright and Coyle, 1998; McCullough and Witvliet, 2002; Seligman, 2002). Rather, forgiveness is something you do for yourself in order to reduce your level of psychological distress through the release of toxic negative emotions. It has been said that the opposite of love is not hate (rather, it is indifference), since hating someone takes just as much energy as loving them, with the direction of the energy being the only difference. The negative energy and emotion that you put into not forgiving can, over time, cause major negative health outcomes while the person who committed the transgression against you suffers no further ill effects due to unforgiveness (van Oyen Witvliet et al., 2001). It seems that by not forgiving, you allow your transgressors to victimize you all over again and for an indefinite amount of time. Essentially, forgiveness allows you to take your power back. That being said, forgiveness is something that you must freely choose to do and something that will take hard work.

To help get you started down the path of forgiveness, you are being asked to write a letter in which you describe a transgression that has been committed against you and the emotions related to that transgression. Then, pledge to forgive the transgressor (if appropriate), but **DO NOT SEND** or discuss the contents of the letter with the person you write it to. The purpose of this exercise is to help you experience the power of forgiveness even in the absence of feedback. Hence, your letter can be written to someone whom you are no longer in contact with or someone who may have already passed away. Finally, some people hold unforgiveness toward themselves. If this is the case for you, writing a forgiveness letter to yourself is appropriate.

Please briefly respond to the following questions after you have written your forgiveness letter:

1. What did it feel like to write your forgiveness letter?
2. Do you feel as if you are truly ready and willing to commit to forgiveness? Why or why not?
3. How did it feel to complete and read over the letter?