

## HOW TO PRACTICE FORGIVENESS

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**DO YOU HAVE PROBLEMS FORGIVING, ASKING TO BE FORGIVEN, OR FORGIVING YOURSELF? YOU ARE NOT ALONE.** We all fail to do or be our best. We all make mistakes. We all need forgiveness for one thing or another.

The great promoter of civil disobedience Gandhi noted, "The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong."

The good news: forgiveness can be learned, or better yet, relearned; and the learning is not difficult. Moreover, the more you practice forgiveness, the stronger your ability to deal with life's struggles including the bad things people do that make forgiving difficult.

Why relearned? Very young children forgive automatically. One minute, a two year old is having a temper tantrum and filled with rage, the next minute s/he seeks the comfort of your arms, and in no time is playing happily. Mainly this is because very young children live from moment to moment. If the moment feels good, the child feels good.

Then, as the ability to talk blossoms, negative self-talk also blooms and creates the tendency to carry bad feelings into the future; grudges grow, the hurt keeps repeating making forgiving difficult. Then as the child becomes more and more able to think realistically, s/he begins to understand choice and that people often choose to hurt or harm others. This intensifies the tendency to hold on to resentment, which is not good for your health, rather than let go

**THREE STEPS BUILD YOUR ABILITY TO FORGIVE** Strengthening your ability to forgive involves examining your understanding of why people do bad things, changing your negative self-talk and practicing EFTI's Daily Forgiveness Exercise.

**How do you explain the bad things people do?** Finding the right slogan for practicing forgiveness depends in part on having a helpful explanation for why people do bad things. Half the work of forgiveness, is to step out of your pain, so you can make sense of the other person's behavior. As the Catholic theologian, Thomas A. Kempis noted, "Be assured that if you knew all, you would pardon all.

The following ideas promote understanding.

1. Believing people want to do the right thing.
2. Believing people do their best, but it is not always enough to keep from hurting others.
3. Accepting human frailty.
4. Accepting conflicting needs.
5. Realizing the more hurtful a person's behavior, the more something has gone wrong in his or her life.
6. Realizing people are part of their culture, and some cultures promote harmful behavior.

**Controlling negative self-talk is a learned skill and while it requires lots of practice.** Changing negative self-talk involves four simple steps:

1. **Knowing your Inner Critic**—as we grow we take in the voices of all the nay-sayers in our world. No one reaches adulthood without hearing "No" or "You can't" or "Stop" or "Don't over and over again. The necessary nay-saying of parents, teachers and others eventually gives birth to an Inner Critic. Your Inner Critic has his or her useful moments, but mostly generates negative self-talk that does no longer does any good.
2. **Checking the reality of your Inner Critic's advice.** Because of the occasional usefulness of your Inner Critic, you do need to do a reality check when you Inner Critic starts nagging you.
3. **Finding a strong slogan to silence your Inner Critic's useless sayings.**
4. **Repeating the slogan** over and over and over again until it automatically kicks in against your Inner Critic's useless or harmful self-talk.

**Practicing forgiveness daily. Forgiveness is one of the Twelve Daily Emotional Fitness Exercises.** The exercise is best practiced in the evening.

**First, do a safety check.** Forgiveness does not mean allowing yourself to be abused, particularly physically abused. Before practicing forgiveness, you must be physically safe. Forgiveness does not mean forgetting, or staying with those who are abusive. First, work to get safe and then worry about forgiveness.

**Second, define forgiveness accurately. Forgiveness means letting go of revenge, so the circle of hurt is halted.**

**Third look at the pain.** Pain teaches important lessons. Pain reminds us to keep our hands out of the fire. Pain reminds us to enjoy the good when it comes. Pain reminds us to be careful about expecting more than we or life can deliver. Name the exact hurt or pain.

Maybe some hurt or anger lingers on from when someone said something unkind. Did someone treat you unfairly? Take without giving in return? Embarrass you in public? Break a promise? Betray a hope? Say or do something cruel? Do something far worse than these?

Thank the pain, thank it for the lesson and then tell it “Enough”.

**To forgive another:** Take some calming breaths. Breathe normally. Select just one person and if just learning to practice forgiveness begin a small hurt by someone you care for. The hurt should be one that still brings pain when you recall it. Visualize the person you want to forgive, coming to you as a small child, tears in his or her eyes. Hear the words “Forgive me.” Remind yourself forgiveness means not seeking revenge. Say the words “I forgive.” Repeat the words “I forgive” until you feel a softening toward the person. Take a final deep calming breath and move on to forgiving yourself.

**To forgive yourself:** Take some calming breaths. Breathe normally. Select just one person, and if just learning to practice forgiveness begin with someone you know is forgiving. Decide if you need to do an amends and if so, plan the amends. If an apology will be enough, plan the apology.

See yourself making the amends. Visualize the person’s response, their pleasure in your caring enough to seek their forgiveness. Hear the words “I forgive.” Feel the forgiveness. This is a rehearsal for the real thing unless the person is not longer in your life. If that is the case, this is sufficient. Otherwise, when you feel confident you can properly ask the person to forgive you. Do so.

**HOW TO USE THE POSTER COACHES THAT CAME WITH THIS EBOOK** Poster coaches are motivational reminders. Two posters are part of this tool kit. One is designed to help you replace negative self talk. The second is the Quote Poster. Both encourage you to Remember What Matters about forgiveness.

Print up at least two copies of each poster.

Post them in separately in places where you will see one or the other throughout the day. Put one in your bedroom to remind you to carry out an apology or amends in the morning and to do the Forgiveness Exercise before falling asleep.

When you see one of the posters, take a deep breathe. Focus on one of the sayings or quotes. If a saying, repeat it several times and then take another deep breathe and go on. If a quote, spend a few moments, thinking about what matters for a few minutes and then take another deep breathe and go on about your day.

For those who are not familiar with EFTI’s exercise Remember What Matters, basically it asks you to not sweat the small stuff and to remember at the end of life, people almost always wish they had spent more time with family and friends and been more caring. Caring and trying to make the world safer and better for all matter most.

### **MORE MAY BE NEEDED**

Practicing forgiveness is a major self-care tool. Self-care is also improved by the following steps.

1. [Practicing a Daily Emotional Fitness Program.](#)
2. Planning ahead as much as possible.
3. Reducing expectations of self, others, and life.
4. Finding a complaint partner . Someone who won’t tell you what to do, be too sympathetic, but will honor your strengths.
5. Developing some cheerleaders . People who always make you feel good.
6. Owning your choices. We don’t control everything, but we do control many things. Owning the choices we make strengthens us.

7. Joining or creating a support group'
8. Getting a coach,
9. Talking to a therapist.

### **SOME FINAL WORDS**

Life is often difficult, relationships are frequently stressful. Living the Mission is not easy, doing good, being kind, caring about others, trying to be helpful is rarely rewarded. Live the Mission, do good, care, help, and be kind anyway. It matters. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise.

**To escape hatred is to triumph.**

**Cicero, Roman philosopher**

# PRACTICE FORGIVENESS

*Forgiving is not forgetting; it is actually remembering and not using your right to hit back.*

*Desmond Tutu, Anglican Bishop, Peace Activist*

*He that cannot forgive others breaks the bridge over which he must pass himself; for every man has need to be forgiven.*

*Thomas Fuller, 16th Century English historian*

*Know all and you will pardon all.*

*Thomas A'Kempis, Medieval Catholic Monk*

*If you can't forgive and forget, pick one.*

*Robert Brault, American writer*

*Always forgive your enemies - nothing annoys them so much.*

*Oscar Wilde, Irish Poet*

*Forgive your enemies, but never forget their names.*

*John F. Kennedy, USA President*

*Forgive, son; men are men; they needs must err.*

*Euripides*

*Forgiveness is the fragrance that the violet sheds on the heel that has crushed it.*

*Mark Twain aka Samuel Clemons, American Humorist*

*He that cannot forgive others breaks the bridge over which he must pass himself; for every man has need to be forgiven.*

*Thomas Fuller, 16th Century English historian*

**STAY STRONG**

**MAKE IT WORK**

**HOLD ON LET GO**

**EXPECT LESS CARE MORE**

**EVERYONE  
DOES THE BEST  
THEY CAN**

**PRACTICE KINDNESS**

**DO WHAT YOU CAN**

**BAD HAPPENS**

**GOOD HAPPENS**

**CHANGE HAPPENS**

**FEELINGS COME FEELINGS GO**

**NOW IS NOT FOREVER**

**REMEMBER WHAT MATTERS**

**STAR**

**FORGIVE**

**WAIT**

**BREATH**

**HOPE**

**LOVE**

**UNDERSTAND**

**CHERISH THE GOOD**

**ACT**

**PLOTS**

## WHAT OTHERS SAY ABOUT EFTI'S POSTER COACHES

Got right to the point, and as promised was like having a face-to-face coach and for pennies.

Lynne Dogerty, Millsboro, Delaware

No fancy promises, only sound advice you can use right away. Amazing, I didn't think something so simple would work, but it made such a change in my life, that my boss wondered where the complaining, blaming me was hiding.

David King, Brooklyn, NY

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