

EXPLORING BEYOND DIVORCE

Coaching Guide • Topic 08 of 12

The Power of Forgiveness and Acceptance

Forgiveness is not something we do for others. We do it for ourselves.

About This Topic

Forgiveness may be the most misunderstood concept in divorce recovery. It is not about excusing what happened, pretending it didn't hurt, or welcoming back someone who caused harm. It is about freeing yourself from the weight of anger and resentment so you can move forward.

What Forgiveness Is NOT

Before we can understand forgiveness, it helps to clear away what it is often confused with.

Forgiveness is NOT...

- Forgetting — it happened, and the lessons should be retained, even as the pain is released
- Excusing — we excuse those not to blame; we forgive because a wrong was committed
- Giving permission for hurtful behavior to continue
- Condoning past or future behavior
- Reconciliation — forgiveness and reconciliation are separate decisions
- Requiring an apology — you can forgive without one

On "Forgive and Forget"

Forgetting might actually lead to denying or suppressing feelings — which is not forgiveness. True forgiveness involves acknowledging the wrong, reflecting on it, and deciding how you want to think about it. You don't have to forget in order to forgive.

What Forgiveness IS

Forgiveness is a shift in thinking toward someone who has wronged you — a decision to release the desire for revenge or continued ill-will, and to eventually wish them well, or at least neutrally.

Forgiveness IS...

- A decision to let go of the desire for revenge and negative feelings
- A shift toward decreased anger and ill-will
- A natural resolution of the grief process
- An acknowledgment of pain and loss — not a denial of it
- Something we do for our own wellbeing — not for theirs
- Possible even without an apology from the other person

Steps Toward Forgiveness

- Acknowledge your own inner pain — don't minimize or rush past it
- Express those emotions in non-hurtful ways — without yelling or attacking
- Try to understand the point of view and motivations of the person to be forgiven
- Replace anger with compassion — not necessarily for them, but for yourself
- Protect yourself from further victimization
- Forgive yourself for the role you played — however small — in the relationship
- Consider a private act of forgiveness — verbally or in writing

The Goodbye Letter Practice

Consider writing a letter fully disclosing all your thoughts and feelings — about the hurt, the loss, and your forgiveness. Do not hold anything back. This letter is NOT meant to be sent. Many people find it meaningful to read the letter aloud privately and then burn it — watching the smoke carry it away. It is a ceremonial act of letting go.

Benefits of Forgiveness

Research consistently shows that forgiveness has measurable benefits for physical and emotional health.

What Forgiveness Can Bring

- Fewer episodes of depression
- Higher self-esteem and self-worth
- Closer, more trusting relationships
- Better immune system function
- Lower blood pressure and reduced risk of heart disease

- Fewer stress-related health issues overall

The Power of Acceptance

Acceptance is the companion of forgiveness. It is a person's assent to the reality of a situation — without attempting to change it, protest it, or exit it. Acceptance is not resignation. It is clarity.

Surviving the breakup of a marriage can leave you wiser about what love is — and what it is not. Relationships can and do end. Love has many unforeseen twists and turns. We can heal and survive loss — and be wiser because of it.

Reflection Questions

1. What were your past misconceptions about forgiveness? How has your understanding shifted?

2. What does forgiveness mean to you, in your own words?

3. Is there something — or someone — you are carrying resentment toward right now? What would it mean to begin to release it?

4. What might you need to forgive yourself for — regarding your role in the relationship?

5. How does acceptance go hand in hand with forgiveness in your healing right now?

A Closing Thought

If we wait for an apology before we forgive, we run the risk of suffering longer than necessary. Forgiveness is a choice we make for our own well-being — independent of what the other person does or says.

"Forgiveness is not something we do for other people. We do it for ourselves — to let go of the past and move on."

Additional Support Available

1-on-1 Clarity Sessions • Weekly Zoom Support Groups • exploringbeyonddivorce.org