

Helping Clients Forgive:

When They Want To Forgive But Don't Know How

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Helping Clients Forgive *"Life is an adventure in forgiveness" John Dryden*

■ **Presentation Outline**

■ **Introduction**

- *What is Forgiveness*
 - *Why Forgive*
 - *Whom to Forgive*
 - *When to Forgive*
 - *How to Forgive*
-

"Forgiveness is a conversation, and like most conversations, it needs a language that is clear, honest and sincere."

Tutu

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*"It's one thing to have a heart broken,
Quite another to have it poisoned." dk*

■ **Introduction**

■ **Profile of a Candidate for Forgiveness**

- *One has been deeply offended*
- *The offense is like a betrayal or abandonment*
- *It's irreversible – can't be undone or deleted*
- *It changes one's life course and robs one's dreams*
- *Day and night the memory combined with pain continues*
- *The injustice turns to resentment which ends in a poisoned heart*
- *You are now imprisoned, seeing only walls, desiring only to be free*

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- *Introduction*
- *Daniel's Story*
 - *My Father's Story*
 - *My Client's Question*
 - *How To Forgive*
 - *Themes on the Forgiving Path*

*"Forgive your enemies,
But never forget their names." JFK*

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- *Introduction*
- *Pamela's Story*
 - *Childhood: Forgiveness vs Revenge*
 - *How to Forgive Your Ex-Husband* (and get on with your life)
 - *Forgiveness Conversations*

***“You will feel freer in all your relationships, and
experience more love and joy than you ever thought possible.”***

Hootman and Perkins 1982 p.172

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"Forgiving forgives only the unforgiveable." Jacques Derrida

■ **What Is Forgiveness?**

■ Why So Many Definitions?

- *It is part of the human narrative*
- *We offend and are offended in many ways*
- *Offenses have no bounds of language, culture, age, gender, creed or religion – Forgiveness is a survival value for our flawed condition*
- *Forgiveness is imbedded in the universal value of justice – The haunting question is this: "Can justice be restored when once lost?"*
- *The articulation of a universal value is complex, resulting in a plethora of descriptions and definitions and therefore is often elusive.*

"There is one universal law ... That law is justice."

ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE

Helping Clients Forgive *"Forgiveness does not change the past, it transforms the future."*

Paul Boese

- ***What Is Forgiveness?***
 - ***Forgiveness is Not ...***
 - ***Forgetting***
 - ***Excusing***
 - ***Denying***
 - ***Settling***
 - ***Amnesty***

***"Forgiveness may not be as sweet as revenge,
but it seems to have fewer damaging side-effects."***

Masi Noor

Helping Clients Forgive *“Forgiveness is the fragrance the violet sheds on the heels that crushed it.” M. Twain*

- **What Is Forgiveness**
 - **Forgiveness is Not ...**
 - **Reconciling**
 - **Absolution**
 - **Tolerance**
 - **An Event**

***“When we forgive an injustice,
We do not excuse it,
We do not tolerate it,
We do not deny it,
We look the evil full in the face,
Let it’s horror shock, stun and enrage us,
And only then do we forgive.”***

Lewis Smedes

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"Vengeance is a lazy man's justice."

The Interpreter (DVD)

■ **What is Forgiveness?**

- **Two Movements**
 - *What has been done to me*
 - *What I need to do*

*"I will not be held accountable
For what has been done to me,
But will be held responsible
For what I do in return."*

Viktor Frankl

"... whenever one has to face a fate that cannot be changed ... just then is one given an opportunity to actualize the highest value ... For what matters above all is the attitude we take toward suffering. The attitude in which we take our suffering upon ourselves." Viktor Frankl

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***"The essence of human existence lies in the stance taken toward a fate that cannot be changed." Beverly Flanigan
Forgiving the Unforgivable***

"Nothing can make justice just like mercy." Robert Frost

■ **What is Forgiveness?**

■ **Two Movements**

- ***What has been done to me – an injustice***
 - ***What I do in return – seek justice with mercy***
-

- ***"When faced with an injustice that cannot be altered, we are given a unique opportunity – by withholding our need for entitled retribution we absorb the debt and demonstrate mercy." dk***

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"Though justice be thy plea, consider this, that in the course of justice, none of us should see salvation: we do pray for mercy." The Merchant of Venice Act IV Scene I

■ What is Forgiveness?

"Forgiving is the practice of merging justice with mercy." dk

■ Two Movements

- *What has been done to me – an injustice*
- *What I need to do – seek justice with mercy*

-
- *"If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them; but the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being, and who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?" Aleksandra Solzhenitsyn The Gulag Archipelago 1918 -1956*

Helping Clients Forgive ... "We demand justice for the offender and cry mercy for ourselves." dk

■ ***Why Forgive***

■ ***Forgiveness Ignores Justice ... Is the Charge***

- ***That forgiving is perceived as unfair is common and justified***
- ***The sense of unfairness is cause for resistance - but our need for justice provides the motivation to forgive***
- ***The Sunflower ... Karl couldn't pay ... then what?***

"Forgiveness seems ... unnatural. Our sense of fairness tells us that people should pay for the wrong they do." Smedes

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*"Justice consists in taking from no one what is theirs." Hobbes (1652)
(paraphrased)*

- **Why Forgive?**
 - **Three Influences**
 - **Justice - A Universal Value**
 - **Our Social Nature - Our Need to be Connected**
 - **The Human Condition - To Know Justice and Do Injustice**

***"We recognize justice
and deal injustice daily,
This tension contaminates
relationships." dk***

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***"Nothing is to be preferred
above justice." Socrates***

- ***Why Forgive***

- ***Justice***

- ***There may be no greater ultimate value***
- ***We know, understand and experience justice***
- ***Justice is wisdom and part of the universal conscience***
- ***We suffer under injustice***

***"All great things are simple and many can be
expressed in a single word: freedom,
justice, honour, mercy, hope."***

Winston Churchill

Helping Clients Forgive *"To have a place of belonging, is not the greatest thing - it's the only thing." dk*

■ **Why Forgive?**

"It's really quite simple. People's most basic need in life is relationship. People connected to people thrive and grow, and those not connected whither and die." Henry Cloud M.D.

■ **Our Social Nature**

- **We Need to be Connected**
- **We Thrive When We Are Connected**
- **We Die When We Are Not Connected**

"Relationships create crisis and tensions ... from which no one can entirely escape. But whether a human life is built on this [social] foundation or broken against these rocks ... It is violently shaken and forever shaped." Mortimer Adler (1952)

Helping Clients Forgive "People will let us down and forgiving is about letting go of the expectation that they won't." Contacuzino

- ***Why Forgive***
- ***The Human Flaw***
 - *We Know and Understand Justice*
 - *Our knowledge is not always reflected in our behavior*
 - *Our offenses incur debts which contaminate relationships*

"[Our] capacity for justice makes [forgiveness] possible; but [our] inclination to injustice makes [forgiveness] necessary."

Reinhold Niebuhr

Helping Clients Forgive *"To be social is to be forgiving."* Robert Frost

- **Why Forgive ...** *Is there another way?*

"The only remedy to the inevitability of history is forgiveness, otherwise we remain trapped into the predictability of history."
Hannah Arendt

- **Forgiveness is the Wholesome Option**

- *The way to reverse the inevitable results of injustice, is to forgive*
- *The way to restore relationships that have been severed by injustice, is to forgive.*
- *The way to redeem the human flaw, is to forgive.*

"Without forgiveness life is governed by an endless cycle of resentment and retaliation."
Robert Assagioli

Helping Clients Forgive *"Choosing to forgive means you've decided to begin the healing process."* Doe Zanatamata

- **When to Forgive**

- **Timing**

- **Recognize that forgiveness may not be every person's choice. "The emerging literature on forgiveness talks mainly about forgiveness and non-forgiveness and measures them on a continuum. However, [for some clients] it may be ... that moving on therapeutically is a valid health enhancing goal ... Involving forgiveness and needs to be recognized as such."** Macaskill 2002

"Forgiveness ceases to be helpful when it's offered as a universal prescription – or if pushed or praised in an overly inflated way."

Noor and Cantacuzino

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■ *When to Forgive*

■ *Timing*

- *Help clients recognize the signs indicating that they may be ready to consider forgiveness: isolation, perfectionism, addictions, self pity, overachieving ...
"Do you want to keep what you have or reach out for more?"*

"In one way or another, hurts and grievances rule our minds: How much mental space are you willing to rent out to your hurts and grievances?"

Forgiveness is Really Strange by Noor and Contacuzino

Helping Clients Forgive ... "To everything there is a season and a time for everything under the sun - A time to breakdown - and a time to heal." Ecclesiastes

■ **When to Forgive**

Perhaps a useful answer to the question, "Have I forgiven them?" is "Do I want to forgive them today?"

- **Timing**
- **Remind clients who choose the forgiveness path that each of us has our own timetable for healing ...**
- **"Healing is an internal process. It happens inside you and therefore cannot be measured or controlled by arbitrary external factors, including calendars." Simon & Simon 1990**

"Forgiveness is when we put "getting even" aside and pursue justice." dk

Helping Clients Forgive *“Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.” Jesus*

■ **When to Forgive**

- *Forgiving is not an event – it’s a path*
- *Forgiving is done in the “perfect tense”*
- *Forgiving is a mind-set ... A way of being*

“Forgiveness takes courage and can be a lonely path. Those around you may see it as an act of betrayal or feel angry and vengeful on your behalf.”

Noor and Contacuzino

Helping Clients Forgive *"The consequences of unforgiveness are far greater than their causes." dk*

- ***Whom To Forgive***
 - ***The Person***
 - ***The Person Who Offended You***
 - ***The Person Who Wounded You***
 - ***The Person Who Wronged You***

"Forgiveness when learned well is practised without reluctance or compulsion." dk

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*"Knowing what is lost is important,
Knowing what is left is imperative." dk*

■ **How to Forgive**

■ **Three Themes**

■ **Grieve the Loss**

- *Paganini – He focused on what was left*

■ **Deal with Injustice**

- *Viktor Frankl – "we take our suffering upon ourselves."*

■ **Cancel the Debt**

- *The Drowning Man Trial – The opportunity to exercise mercy*

*"So much has been given me,
I have no time to ponder
That which has been denied."*

Helen Keller

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■ *How to Forgive*

■ *Boundaries*

- *Believing that reconciliation is a requirement of forgiveness can often interfere with people choosing to forgive in the first place or prevents them from forgiving fully and completely*
- *There can be a magnificent difference between forgiving someone inside our hearts and allowing the person to remain a part of our lives*
- *Whether we allow someone to remain in our lives and hearts after a hurt has occurred is often a careful, nuanced consideration*

"The only possible redemption from the predicament of being able to undo what is done ... is the faculty of forgiveness." Hannah Arendt

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*"Revenge makes promises
it can't deliver." dk*

- *How to Forgive?*

- *The Process of Forgiveness*

- *The offended one is able to identify a loss which is an injustice*
- *The offended one chooses to abandon anger and resentment toward the offender, rather than respond with justifiable retaliation and the expectation of retribution*
- *The offended one grieves the loss and cancels the debt which the offender owes, acknowledging that justice had been done*

"No one forgives for another."

Truth and Reconciliation

*"Only the wounded have the
authority to forgive." dk*

Helping Clients Forgive “Anger is an acid which does more harm in the vessel it is stored than on anything it is poured ” Mark Twain

■ ***How To Forgive***

- ***Selfishly – It is the gift you give yourself***
- ***Mercifully – Mercy closes the file as justice is done***
- ***Intolerantly – Forgiveness is not tolerance of injustice***

“The strongest argument in favor of forgiveness is the alternative - a permanent state of unforgiveness.”

Philip Yancey

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"When mercy seasons justice ..." Shakespeare

■ *How To Forgive*

- *"Forgiveness is the process in which the offended, in an attitude of mercy, through intentional and mindful decision, purposes to withhold the desired and entitled payment of debt from the offender, choosing rather to suffer the weight of the burden in their own body by absorbing the cost, cancelling the debt and releasing the offender."*

"The quality of mercy is not strained ... [and] is twice blessed; it blesses him that gives and him that takes." Shakespeare

Helping Clients Forgive “Not to forgive is to hope for a better past.” dk

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Helping Clients Forgive ***“I was angry with my friend, I told my wrath, my wrath did end.” Wordsworth***

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*“Forgiveness is not the same as pardon ...
you may forgive someone and still insist on
a just punishment for that wrong.”*

Lewis Smedes

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***"If we ... want to love
We must learn to forgive."***

Mother Theresa

***"In a world of flawed communication
Community is possible through
Understanding others***

***In a world of painful alienation
Community is created through
Accepting others***

***In a world of broken trust
Community is sustained
By forgiveness***

Augsburger

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