



CONCERN:EAP

Healthy & Resilient You

Learning How to Forgive and Let Go



The Power in Putting
the Past Behind

I'M
ALWAYS
RIGHT!

I'M
NEVER
WRONG!



“When you forgive, you in no way change the past – but you sure do change the future.”

– Bernard Meltzer ”

We’ve all felt the sting of a careless word or the wound of a hurtful action. Sometimes it can be hard to move past the pain and resentment. And though forgiving may be easier said than done, holding a grudge might be even harder on you in the long run. That’s because, as science shows us, nursing resentment can have serious effects on your mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing.

Holding Grudges, Holding Tension

Forgiveness has been a staple of positive psychology for a long time. **The popular proverb, “To err is human; to forgive, divine,” has roots in a poem written by Alexander Pope way back in 1711.** More recently, behavioral science has explored the physiological and psychological effects of holding a grudge. Though it has yet to be proven that forgiveness is divine, it is becoming clear that letting go of grudges is good medicine.

For example, one study out of Hope College in Michigan found that even the act of *imagining* holding a grudge can stress us out. During the study, when people were asked to recall past hurts and offenders in an unforgiving way, they all experienced heightened levels of detrimental stress-indicators, such as:

- Sweating, increased heart rate, higher blood pressure
- Diminished sense of self-control
- Increased emotional turmoil



Conversely, participants who were asked to imagine forgiving their past offenders not only experienced lower levels of stress, but they also reported a greater sense of wellbeing, control, and positive emotion.

Other studies indicate that holding on to feelings of anger or bitterness over time can extend this stress response and lead to serious health problems, like depression and cardiovascular troubles, while letting go of a grudge has the opposite effect.


Practicing forgiveness can help


- ⊖ Lower blood pressure
- ⊖ Decrease levels of cortisol (the stress hormone) in our bloodstream
- ⊕ Boost our immune system
- ⊕ Increase resilience
- ⊖ Reduce the impact of chronic pain





Forgiveness Is First and Foremost for You


It's **not always easy to forgive**, but it's important to remember that when you hold a grudge, you're only harming yourself. Here are some approaches that can help you forgive and move on.


 **Express yourself:** Before you can let feelings go, you have to experience them. Naming and expressing feelings of hurt and anger, whether by journaling or discussing with confidants or, in more serious cases, a therapist, can help you acknowledge what happened, why it wasn't OK, and empower you to work past it.

 **Commit to forgive for yourself:** As we mentioned earlier, **grudges = bad for you / forgiveness = good for you**. So, decide that you are going to work on forgiveness for yourself and no one else.

 **Stop the instant replay:** Memories of hurtful experiences can easily switch into automatic playback in our minds, prolonging the initial pain and stress. Break the cycle with this **simple mindfulness meditation technique**.

 **Remember: Forgiveness doesn't always mean reconciliation:** The act of forgiveness comes with no obligation to excuse another's actions or repair a damaged relationship. It's enough to forgive for yourself and the benefit to your emotional and physical wellbeing.

 **Try to empathize: Treating others with empathy and kindness**—even if they've been hurtful—can help us to minimize resentment and not take the situation so personally. By imagining the other person's circumstances, background, and intentions, we can remind ourselves that we're all human, all fallible at times, and all in need of forgiveness sometimes.

 **Find the lesson:** We can learn something important from every experience in life, and sometimes the most painful ones offer up the best lessons. When someone hurts you, try thinking about how you could act differently if circumstances were reversed. Not only can this help ensure you don't treat others the same way in the future, but it might also help you to better understand and empathize with your offender.

Cultivating a grateful attitude can also help you work through feelings of hurt, and take back your power from the person or situation that hurt you. Remember that the best revenge is moving on and living your life to the fullest and freest.

For more resilience building tools and strategies, visit the **CONCERN Resilience Hub™**. First-time users may be asked to enter their company code.

This newsletter is intended for informational purposes only, and should not be used to replace professional advice.

If you find your level of stress is impacting your well-being, you can contact us for additional help and support.

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