

Forgiveness
is a choice
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Goal: Commit to starting the process of forgiveness.

Nearly everyone can recall being hurt by the actions, behaviors or words of another. It might have been many years ago or you may have experienced hurts that are very fresh in your memory. Some of us have experienced many hurts in our lives that have left lasting feelings of anger or resentment. Resentment and anger often hurt you more than the target of your anger does. Anger and holding a grudge can predispose you to anxiety, depression, disturbed sleep, higher blood pressure, an irregular heart rhythm and an increased risk of heart attack. So what you do with these hurts in life makes a difference in how they affect your overall health and wellbeing. Forgiveness is one way to reduce the overall affects from hurts in our life. Forgiveness doesn't require you to justify, excuse or deny a wrong that was done to you but it is a choice that you make to give up anger and resentment while acknowledging that you were hurt. It is a choice and is for you and not for the forgiven. Those you forgive are often undeserving of your kindness but you are. Studies have shown that voluntarily giving up bitterness and practicing forgiveness can have a positive impact on our health, including improved blood pressure, decreased stress, improved relationships, and more.

Forgiveness is a Process

Forgiveness is a gentle process of [letting go of grudges and bitterness](#) or reducing resentments and motivations toward anger and revenge. Initially, short term anger toward the hurtful person is appropriate and may be needed. [Forgiveness is not easy](#) and it takes time. Forgiveness is a commitment to a process of change. Even after forgiving, the mind may repeatedly try to revisit the hurt or something may trigger a memory. Bring self-compassion to the forgiveness process.

To begin the process of forgiving:

- Start by focusing on yourself and how forgiveness may help you heal, end your pain and disempower the person who hurt you.
- Reflect on the facts of the situation, how you've reacted, and how this has affected your life, health and well-being. Try to understand others' actions and if there was something to be learned from the situation. Humans are limited and fallible and we often hurt those we love the most.
- When you're ready, actively choose to forgive the person who's offended you in whatever way feels right to you. You may say it silently to yourself, out loud, in a letter or in person.
- Remember: You can forgive someone without excusing their actions.
- In some situations you may have to forgive yourself and find self-acceptance and self-compassion.
- Forgiveness is not an all or nothing activity and may take time. You may choose to lessen the anger and feelings of hate as a start.

When Forgiveness is Difficult

- For major traumatic events, forgiveness may need [professional help](#).
- In some instances, not forgiving may be appropriate. Never allow a hurtful situation to continue that could impact your personal safety. Forgiveness of someone who continually wrongs you is not healthy and may increase your stress. Seek professional assistance to discuss these situations.
- Forgiving yourself is important for minor transgressions but forgiving yourself too easily for a harmful behavior or repeated behaviors can make it harder to ultimately stop.