

# *Forgiveness*

Conflict and mistakes are going to occur in marriages, even in the best marriages. But it is often hard to forgive after we have been hurt (even if our partner didn't mean to). Without forgiveness there can be resentment, bitterness, lack of trust, and other feelings that make it difficult to remain close and dedicated to the relationship.

## **What is Forgiveness?**

**Does forgive mean forget? NO!**

We can forgive someone but not forget what happened. To forgive basically means that we are going to try to move beyond the problem and put it in the past. This means that we do not continue to bring up the problem. Even though you remember what happened, you do not feel the need to hold it over your partner's head.

**Does forgive mean that what happened was OK? NO!**

Forgiving the other person for what happened does not take away any responsibility they have for the problem. Forgiveness does not give them permission to do it again.

**Forgiveness is a decision to give up otherwise understandable resentment against, or the desire to punish your partner. Forgiveness is an active word, it is something you must decide to do!**

## *Steps to Make Forgiveness Happen*

### 1) Set up a time to discuss the specific issue related to forgiveness.

Use the Speaker-Listener technique to discuss the issue. No distractions. Discuss the issue openly, honestly, and with respect. Use the ground rules of discussion. Fully explore the pain and concerns related to the issue for BOTH of you. This may take more than one time if the discussion becomes too hot.

### 2) The offender asks for forgiveness.

The offender sincerely apologizes for the pain and concerns that came up. Even if the offender did not mean to cause the hurt feelings, s/he can still express regret that there were hurt feelings. It is also important to validate the partner's pain, letting them know that you understand why they feel hurt. This does not mean that you beat up on yourself either; you also need to forgive yourself.

### 3) The offended agrees to forgive.

It is important to openly express the desire to forgive, especially for significant issues. In this step there is a clear statement of the desire to actively forgive.

### 4) If it applies, set up a plan for the future.

This may include discussing how to deal with similar situations. It may involve talking about what will help each of you see that the other is sticking to the bargain of forgiveness. This does not mean that the offended person gets to hold the problem over the other (that is not forgiveness). But it can be an active way to show each other that you are committed to working together.

### 5) Expect it to take time.

Forgiveness is not a single event, it is a *process* that takes time. Each of you will need to work on your part for some time, especially for more significant problems. It takes time to rebuild the trust that may have been lost.

**Remember:** Keeping track of the other person, or keeping score to see if they are doing their part does not build trust! Extra reassurance may be important initially, but over time the building of trust depends on both of you keeping yourself on track!