



BalanceWorks® Newsletter

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The Benefits of Forgiveness



Betrayal, aggression, and just plain insensitivity: People can hurt us in a million ways, and forgiveness isn't always easy. Whether you've been cut off in traffic, slighted by your mother-in-law, betrayed by a spouse, or badmouthed by a co-worker, most of us are faced with a variety of situations that we can choose to ruminate over or forgive. But forgiveness, like so many things in life, is easier said than done.

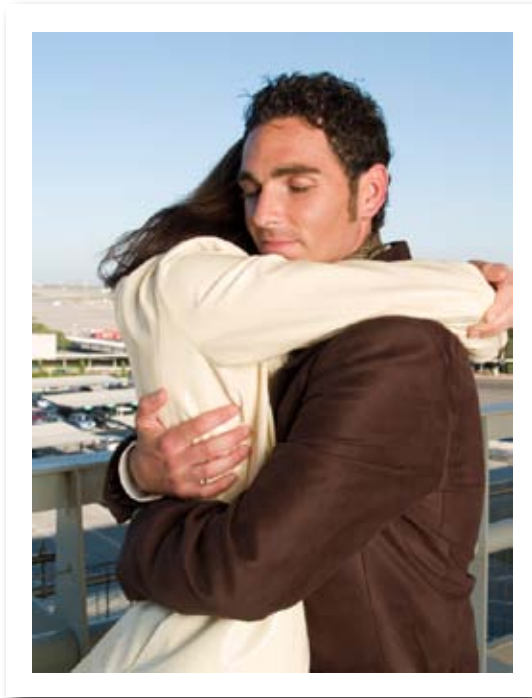
Forgiveness can be a challenge for several reasons. Sometimes forgiveness can be confused with condoning what someone has done to us: "That's OK. Why not do it again?" Forgiveness can be difficult when the person who wronged us doesn't seem to deserve our forgiveness -- it's hard to remember that forgiveness benefits the forgiver more than the one who is forgiven. Ultimately, forgiveness is especially challenging because it's hard to let go of what's happened. However, it's important to let go and forgive. Here are some reasons why:

- Forgiveness is good for your heart -- literally. One study from the Journal of Behavioral Medicine found forgiveness to be associated with lower heart rate and blood pressure as well as

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stress relief. This can bring long-term health benefits for your heart and overall health.

- A later study found forgiveness to be positively associated with five measures of health:

- physical symptoms
- medications used
- sleep quality
- fatigue
- somatic complaints

It seems that the reduction in negative affect (depressive symptoms), strengthened spirituality, conflict management and stress relief one finds through forgiveness all have a significant impact on overall health.

- A third study, published in the Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, found that forgiveness not only restores positive thoughts, feelings and behaviors toward the offending party (in other words, forgiveness restores the relationship to its previous positive state), but the benefits of forgiveness spill over to positive behaviors toward others outside of the relationship. Forgiveness is associated with more volunteerism, donating to charity, and other altruistic behaviors. (And the converse is true of non-forgiveness.)

So, to sum it up, forgiveness is good for your body, your relationships, and your place in the world. That's reason enough to convince virtually anyone to do the work of letting go of anger and working on forgiveness.

By Elizabeth Scott, M.S.

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