

**Addiction Recovery Tools -
Why You Want to Learn To Forgive In Recovery
By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.**

Although forgiveness is an important part of working through feelings, and thus, a tool of recovery and the healing process, it is an often neglected topic. People often erroneously equate forgiveness with forgetting.

The best definition that I ever heard for forgiveness is simply "giving up the need to punish". This definition doesn't say anything about the actual act of punishing, or forgetting--for that matter. It speaks only of letting go of the compulsion, or fantasy of punishing.

We have all heard it said that "resentments are like drinking poison, and waiting for the other person to die". When we hang on to resentment, which is rehashed, recycled hurt and anger, we are hurt by our own action. If you are still writing scenarios in your mind of how you would like to punish that person, or fantasizing about how they will eventually "get theirs", you are the one being punished.

Take an example of hurt and anger left over from a slight that happened in high school. Over the years you've added to this resentment, rehearsing and re-rehearsing the hurt, blaming them for your subsequent hurtful experiences, so that this venomous resentment has taken on a life of its own, like a snowball rolling downhill. The probability is that the person who hurt your feelings in high school doesn't even remember you. They are out having a life. You're the one with the ulcer. So who is being hurt by your resentment? Whose problem is it? Hanging onto old resentments robs takes away peace and joy in the present. It keeps us anchored in the past.

In recovery, we seek to be at peace with others. To do that, healing the pain from the past is sometimes necessary. And sometimes to heal that pain we must forgive. Forgiveness is not a favor that you do for someone else. It's an act of self-liberation. If hanging onto resentments has its root in self-pity and/or blame, we have to let go, in order to embrace recovery. The price is too high to not forgive.

Forgiving does not mean to give anyone an open door policy to trample down our boundaries and reinjure us. It does not mean imply that it is appropriate to accept the unacceptable. Sometimes an inability to forgive involves an inability to let go of the fantasy that we will eventually receive something from that person that we think we need. Perhaps it is positive regard, love, amends, or closure. Forgiving may involve letting go of a fantasy.

So, if you are having a hard time forgiving, ask yourself, "what's the payoff?" There must be a reason that you are refusing to let go. Identify the reward for hanging on, and then ask yourself if that reward is something that you would be better off without.

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