



## Accepting and Forgiving

### Accepting

A powerful tool for improving our ability to function and be happy is the practice of Accepting. Often, we stay stuck in our emotional upsets because we do not know how to resolve the gap between our expectations and what is happening. We may have an expectation that our child will grow up to lead a happy and productive life and, when that is not happening, the gap between our expectations and the reality of our child's choices is difficult for us to resolve. We stay stuck, waiting for something to change to resolve the situation.

It seems paradoxical, but "accepting what is" is a prerequisite for change. Accepting should not be confused with approval. It does not imply liking the situation or being willing to continue allowing it to be a part of your life. It does mean accepting the reality of the situation or the other person's behavior, no matter how objectionable. Once you have accepted the reality of the situation, you are in a much better position to deal with it effectively, creatively, positively and in a way that best benefits you.

### Forgiving

What happens when we cannot let go of anger and resentment? We may spend countless hours reliving hurtful events and harboring grudges. We may hold on to feelings of blame, where we blame our child for our upset feelings. These thoughts keep us trapped in the role of the victim as we continue to focus on how our child has hurt us. Since our emotional energy is focused on the past, we remain unable to move forward.

Over time, the failure to achieve resolution of our anger and resentment takes a physical and emotional toll. Continually thinking about hurtful events can lead to self-defeating behaviors (anger outbursts, retaliation, addiction, avoidance) and high levels of emotional arousal that can ultimately contribute to serious medical problems (e.g. heart disease). Learning to accept, to forgive, and to let go of past – and present - hurts is not easy, but neither is living your life stuck in anger and resentment.

### Exploring the option of forgiving

If you are holding onto hurt or anger, consider forgiving to move forward. Forgiving is not a quick fix. It's a matter of a willed change in our thinking about our own demands that others treat us in a certain way – or else! Like other types of behavior change, the "act of forgiving" is a process and not an event. It starts with a conscious choice, followed by intentional action to change your thinking about your child and their actions.

### Decide if forgiving is in your best interest

What outcome can you expect for yourself if you continue to focus on past hurtful events and your feelings of anger and resentment? Decide if you would like to entertain the idea of forgiving as a strategy to improve your life. Because anger can quickly become toxic, it may be helpful to remember that no one likes being with an angry, bitter or depressed person. Hanging on to hurt not only interferes with your ability to be happy; it also gets in the way of your other relationships and your overall health too.

### Define Forgiving

One reason people sometimes have difficulty with forgiving may have to do with how they define it.

**Forgiving is NOT** the same as trust. Many people think that forgetting is required in order to forgive. But this is not the case. We need to remember what has happened so that we can protect ourselves against further hurts. We can forgive the person, but we would do well not to forget the behavior (e.g. We might forgive our

child for stealing, but we would be wise to lock up our valuables the next time they were around). We can forgive our child and accept the past behavior for the reality that it is. But because we don't forget, we learn that, until they show us otherwise through consistent action, we would be wise not to trust them in matters where they have failed to be trustworthy.

**Forgiving is NOT** about giving up our choice to work to make things better. Instead, forgiving requires giving up the wish to have had things go differently and acting to improve our life and our overall happiness in the present and for the future.

**Forgiving IS** the act of letting go of anger and resentment. When we let go, we can think about events without feeling the physical manifestations of anger and without feeling compelled to resort to unhealthy coping mechanisms like substance misuse (alcohol, food, etc.) or behavioral outbursts. When we let go, the past event becomes just one event in our life and no longer defines who we are – or how we feel.

**Forgiving IS** an act of understanding – understanding that none of us is perfect and that we have all done things that we later regretted.

### **Three Steps to take...**

#### **1. Work to Understand Why Others Act as They Do**

Develop new ways of thinking about your child. Work on seeing their point of view. Recognize that their actions made perfect sense to them at the time, given what was going on in their life.

#### **2. Let Go and Move On**

Forgiving is hard work. Although your anger might seem justified, at some point you must ask yourself. "What kind of person am I, and what is my anger doing today?" Are you a person who wants to remain a bitter, angry victim? Do you want to continue spending your time thinking about how you have been hurt and how unfair it is? Take a good look at your anger and accept that what has happened cannot be changed, and that remaining angry is hurting you more than anyone else.

#### **3. Start Small**

If forgiving as a strategy seems interesting but does not feel natural to you, you may want to begin by experimenting with practicing forgiving in your daily life. For example, consider applying an attitude of forgiving to those frustrating situations involving fellow drivers on your daily commute – or to fellow shoppers and fellow co-workers who behave in less than considerate ways. Work on recognizing that they had reasons that made their actions seem appropriate to them. As you become more comfortable with practicing forgiving, allow yourself to extend the practice to include more personal situations.

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