

Forgiving Yourself & Others

How to Unleash Your Future by Freeing Yourself from Past Traumas

Interactive Workbook

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Forgiving Yourself & Others

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Introduction

“Forgiveness is freeing—for yourself, as well as for others. It frees you from carrying the burden of past resentments. It allows you to release the past so that all your energy can be fully available for the present. Forgiveness is the ultimate gift you can give yourself.”

Author unknown

Forgiveness can be defined as “recognizing you have been wronged, giving up all resulting resentment, and eventually responding to the offending person with compassion and even love.” Forgiving does not mean that we deny we have been wronged, nor is it condoning or excusing our abuse. The key to true forgiveness is letting go of the anger and negative feelings associated with a specific person, group, or situation.

The notion of forgiveness is not new and has been upheld by many of the world’s religion. In Christianity, it is embodied by Jesus who practiced and preached it all the way to the cross. In Judaism, Yom Kippur is a day to atone for the sins of the past year. One must first seek reconciliation with any person that one has wronged, righting the wrongs that have been committed against him or her if possible. It must be done before Yom Kippur. The angel Gabriel exhorts the Islamic prophet Mohammed to set aside his vengeful anger against an enemy, and leave justice to God.

According to scientists, a lot of anger and hostility are present in our society due to unresolved conflicts. This results in a high incidence of domestic abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, violence, divorce, and even crime. We have seen teenagers from middle class families go on killing sprees in their schools as the result of unresolved conflicts and anger.

Studies have documented the psychological benefits of forgiveness: reduced anxiety, stress, and depression. Individuals who harbor anger increase their risk of heart attack, and decrease the response capacity of their immune systems. Once you forgive, anger is decreased, you feel better about yourself, and personal relationships are enhanced.

I have noticed that many of my men and women patients who were abused physically, mentally or sexually, carry that burden throughout their lives.

Their lives are in turmoil, they are suffering from emotional and physical symptoms, and they are having spiritual problems. The simple reason is that because of childhood trauma, their spiritual and emotional growth has been stunted. The angry little child in them is still dealing with childhood issues of abandonment, neglect, physical, emotional, sexual, and verbal abuse.

This burden may stop them from having healthy relationships with their children, peers, and intimate partners. I learned firsthand that in order to be free, a victim has to learn to forgive, or else they will continue to be a victim for the rest of their life.

I did not realize the importance of forgiveness until I had a panic attack. At the age of four, my mother was too poor to raise me. I went to live with a paternal aunt who was, as I saw it, very abusive mentally, physically, verbally and emotionally. I learned that one way to avoid panic attacks now was to forgive her, as well as my mother for not coming to my rescue back then. So I worked on doing it.

I have often read that one has to learn to forgive, that letting go will make one a happier and healthier person. However, like many people, I found that hard to do. But it can be done.

The key to true forgiveness is letting go of the anger and negative feelings associated with yourself or others. Forgiving yourself is coming to grips with the fact that you cannot undo the past, that *what is done is done*. In order to grow and live in balance, one must be committed to positive self-teachings, such as self-love and self-esteem. Self-forgiveness should then be like a natural extension. Being self-condemning or self-righteous will only make matters worse. Forgiving oneself is just one more healing aspect of self-love.

Is there someone in your life you need to forgive?

Here are the steps I take when I need to forgive someone. I hope they help you.

A WORD OF CAUTION: Be aware that these exercises may bring up uncomfortable feelings, psychological or physical pain, and memories, and are no substitute for professional treatment. You may want to consult with a qualified medical, psychiatric or psychological professional beforehand. If at any time they are disturbing to you, you should stop immediately and seriously consider seeking the assistance of a professionally trained therapist to support you in productively working through this material.

Step One

Forgiving Myself

Forgiving yourself may be even more difficult than forgiving others. Over the years, I have seen many patients who have a physical symptom where the cause could not be determined. After probing, it is not uncommon to discover that they were consumed with guilt about something they had done many years ago. It could be as simple as saying “no” to a friend, or more complicated as having an affair or an abortion or even worse, staying in an abusive, intimate relationship. With tears in their eyes, they would admit they have not been able to forgive themselves. They go so far as to say "I know God has forgiven me, but I just can't forgive myself."

One of the biggest obstacles to self-forgiveness may be an unconscious decision to punish ourselves. By doing so, we not only hurt ourselves, we also make those around us suffer along with us. When you don't forgive yourself, it not only affects those around you, it can also be detrimental to your body and your mental health. You will be likely to suffer from difficulty concentrating, depression, digestive problems, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, muscle tension, and heart attacks.

Here are the steps to take to forgive yourself.

How it works:

1. Write down everything you are ashamed of (use worksheet).
2. Write down everything you feel guilty about (use worksheet).
3. Write a letter to yourself saying that you forgive yourself for all of it (use worksheet).
4. Write another letter to yourself, but this time, you'll be writing about all the wonderful qualities you have and all that you do for others. This is what is called a “Gratitude Letter to Yourself.” It's not about ego, but about recognizing that you are a person of value and worth, and that you bring meaning to the lives of others. This, in turn, gives your own life more meaning and depth.

Healing Unfinished Business with Myself Worksheet

Write down everything you are ashamed of:

Write down everything you feel guilty about:

Write a letter to yourself saying that you forgive yourself for all of the above:

My Gratitude Letter to Myself Worksheet

Write a “Gratitude Letter to Myself” about your good qualities, what you do to enrich the life of others, and what you are grateful for in your life:

What are my good qualities?

What do I do to enrich the life of others?

What am I grateful for in my life?

Step Two

Forgiving a Parent, Caretaker, or Abuser

Many women come to my Wellness & Retreat Center for a one-on-one intuitive retreat trying to make sense of their lives. I also help many doing by phone consults. They often do not realize that their emotional and physical symptoms are related to unfinished business with their parents, a caretaker, or an acquaintance – dead or alive. In some cases, a stranger may have perpetrated the abuse.

Those abused by parents and/or primary caretakers have invisible scars that often manifest in: an inability to feel or trust; anxiety problems; depression; relationship problems; eating disorders; and in some cases, alcohol or drug abuse. They live life trying to please others, second-guessing themselves, struggling with perfectionism, lack of confidence, emotional emptiness, and image/weight issues. They find it difficult to get close without losing a sense of self.

Abandonment and neglect wounds can occur in so many ways in early years, such as:

- being left to cry unattended
- being given up for adoption or left in foster care
- not being picked up on time from school or elsewhere
- having too much responsibility to care for oneself or siblings
- being left alone during an illness
- being pushed aside after the birth of a sibling
- having an unsupportive parent
- having a parent who is emotionally unavailable
- having a parent who is emotionally abusive who shames you, yells at you or ignores you, makes you feel you are not trustworthy, controls your way of eating, your appearance, speech, decisions, social life, and other aspects of your childhood
- verbal, physical, emotional, sexual abuse by a parent
- parents separating or divorcing
- a parent living and never returning or not staying in contact
- a parent with a chronic illness
- a parent abusing drug or alcohol
- a parent that stays in an abusive relationship
- a parent dying

Severe cases involve physical and sexual abuse. The younger the child, the harsher the abuse, the more likely it is to leave deep scars in the child's psyche.

It is not uncommon that unresolved issues with a parent will resurface at any time. They appear as emotional and physical symptoms, and are especially evident during stress, or if the parent comes back into their life. The appearance of symptoms can be likened to the body's intuitive wisdom reminding the person that these old wounds have to be resolved.

Patient's Stories

Such was the case with Louise, a 51-year-old woman dealing with unexplained anxiety and fatigue. Her father was an alcoholic, verbally and emotionally abusive to her during her childhood. After her mother passed away, her father was diagnosed with early dementia and Louise became his caretaker. As time went by, Louise became stressed and resentful of the extra demands and additional work when she had her own household to take care of, and she developed frightening stress-related symptoms that prompted her to see doctors.

Jo-Ann at 33 was diagnosed with post-partum depression following the birth of her third child. Her mother was now the perfect grandmother, doting on her grandchildren with gifts and attention – exactly what Jo-Ann had longed for herself while growing up, but never got from her mother.

Yvonne, age 49, had unexplained irregular bleeding when her mother, who had left her with her father as a child, came back into her life wanting to travel to Europe with her teenage grandson.

These women were feeling increasingly depressed, had difficulty sleeping, decreased appetite, fatigue, decreased libido, and were easily overwhelmed. They had no idea that their physical and emotional symptoms were related to their family situation.

Why is the relationship with parents while growing up so important in a woman's life?

Is it a surprise that who we are as adults depends on our relationship with our parents and caretakers during childhood? The basic foundation of how we will behave as adults starts from the womb to age four at home. During the first four years of life – and I believe that it starts in the womb – a child needs someone who offers comfort, shelter, love, acceptance, and security. If these needs are not met by someone, whether a parent or caretaker, it will affect how that child feels about herself and how she relates to the world.

From age four to age eight, it also depends on what happens at school, with friends, and in the neighborhood. However, your parents are the most influential in the development of your self-esteem and how you perceive and value yourself. To have healthy self-esteem, a child has to feel loved unconditionally not for what she does, but for who she is. Children come to expect that their parents are there to protect them and not cause them to suffer.

With emotional wounds, during stressful moments in adult life especially when feeling rejection, the little hurt child will surface and again experience a deeply engrained pain that manifests in a variety of symptoms and behaviors.

Whenever we are in a stressful situation, we feel victimized again and therefore we become that hurt child, with a response just like a child – arguments, temper tantrums, belligerence, selfishness, spitefulness, etc. It is that hurt child, the victim, who is also unable to forgive.

It is the deepest hurts, especially those from childhood, that are the most difficult to face and let go, so the issues are repressed.

Working with women, I teach them how to correlate their unresolved childhood issues with their present emotional and physical symptoms, and also their relationships. When there are unresolved issues with a parent or caretaker, we will see/seek similar situations over and over in adulthood and not be aware of what is going on. Not letting go of that hurt keeps us from maturing emotionally.

Unresolved issues are one of the major causes of unhappiness. Our past can hurt all types of relationships with intimate partners, children, friends, work associates, and our community. Long-term problems may include depression, addictions, and becoming an abuser during adulthood.

Addictions that women usually use to ease the pain usually include food, exercise, alcohol, shopping, gambling, etc...

Healing unloving or hurtful relationships with our parents is the most crucial step to be taken in our lives. It is a most difficult step to take especially if you suffered repeatedly at their hands as a child. It is a life-long battle. You will need to identify and admit parental weaknesses and/or abuse that negatively influence your behavior, and mental, emotional, and spiritual life.

In order to be in control of your life, you will have to heal those issues, and try to forgive.

Once you identify the connection, find help to console the little hurt child in you who is your worst critic.

Remember that:

- Most parents wanted the best for their children, but they were dealing with their own issues – possibly of abandonment and neglect – and many did not have anyone to teach them how to be nurturing parents.
- You did not come with an instruction manual when you were born.
- Remember the good moments and appreciate whatever parental gifts there were.

- Admit that buried, hurtful issues may be the cause of your emotional and physical symptoms in adulthood and find a way to deal with them and heal them.

Important Healing Steps

- Forgive the parent, caretaker, or abuser, whether they are dead or alive. Use the following *Forgiveness Exercise Worksheets*.
- Bring unresolved parental issues to the surface. Once you have identified them, write down the healing steps you plan to take. Use the *Healing Unfinished Business Worksheets*.
- Seek counseling when appropriate on how to heal the traumatized inner child.

My Personal Story

I did not realize the importance of forgiveness until I had the panic attack. I learned that one way to avoid panic attacks was to forgive. I needed to forgive anyone that I felt had hurt me. I have often read that one has to learn to forgive, that letting go will make one a happier and healthier person. But, like many people, I found that hard to do.

I was four years old and my sister, Marise, was two when my distraught mother took us to live with Grandma, my paternal grandmother. After my father left my mother, he refused to support my mother financially unless we went to live with his mother and his sister, whom we nicknamed Tatante.

Tatante was adamant that Marise and I would be raised without contact with my mother's family. She was strict and disrespectful to my mother. I felt like I didn't belong anywhere. I resented Tatante for being mean to us, and for how she treated my mother and her family.

Logically, I understood that the way things worked out, I had received a better education, being the first in my mother's family to graduate from high school. But unconsciously, I had never forgiven my mother for abandoning us as little children. I did not comprehend the heavy burden I carried, but it became clear many years later while working with my therapist.

When I started having panic attacks, I was willing to do anything to make them go away. I decided to try something I had read about. The idea is to indirectly confront the person you wish to forgive by writing down everything about how a specific person has wronged you. I used this process to forgive Tatante, who was

alive and living in Miami, and my mother who was already dead. I have not had a panic attack since.

The Forgiveness Exercise with My Mother Worksheet

A WORD OF CAUTION: Be aware that these exercises may bring up uncomfortable feelings, psychological or physical pain, and memories, and are no substitute for professional treatment. You may want to consult with a qualified medical, psychiatric or psychological professional beforehand. If at any time they are disturbing to you, you should stop immediately and *seriously consider seeking the assistance of a professionally trained therapist to support you in productively working through this material.*

- First write down everything you feel that your mother has done wrong to you. Get it all out. Be as specific as possible.

- Now practice telling your mother everything that you want her to know. If the hurt was done when you were a child, then the confident grown-up you – who is not afraid of that person – takes the shy, scared child onto your lap and has the child tell it all.

- Write down positive things that your mother has done for you. If there are none, that's okay. If you keep thinking, you may remember something kind that this person has done for you.

- Lastly, practice telling your mother that you forgive her, because she did not know any better.

Healing Unfinished Business with My Mother Worksheet

What do I feel are my unresolved issues with my mother?

Healing steps I plan to take:

The Forgiveness Exercise with My Father Worksheet

A WORD OF CAUTION: Be aware that these exercises may bring up uncomfortable feelings, psychological or physical pain, and memories, and are no substitute for professional treatment. You may want to consult with a qualified medical, psychiatric or psychological professional beforehand. If at any time they are disturbing to you, you should stop immediately and *seriously consider seeking the assistance of a professionally trained therapist to support you in productively working through this material.*

- First write down everything you feel that your father has done wrong to you. Get it all out. Be as specific as possible.

- Now practice telling your father everything that you want him to know. If the hurt was done when you were a child, then the confident grown-up you – who is not afraid of him – takes the shy, scared child onto your lap and has the child tell it all.

- Write down positive things that your father has done for you. If there are none, that's okay. If you keep thinking, you may remember something kind that he has done for you.

- Lastly, practice telling your father that you forgive him, because he did not know any better.

Healing Unfinished Business with My Father Worksheet

What do I feel are my unresolved issues with my father?

Healing steps I plan to take:

The Forgiveness Exercise with My Caretaker Worksheet

A WORD OF CAUTION: Be aware that these exercises may bring up uncomfortable feelings, psychological or physical pain, and memories, and are no substitute for professional treatment. You may want to consult with a qualified medical, psychiatric or psychological professional beforehand. If at any time they are disturbing to you, you should stop immediately and *seriously consider seeking the assistance of a professionally trained therapist to support you in productively working through this material.*

- First write down everything you feel that the caretaker has done wrong to you. Get it all out. Be as specific as possible.

- Now practice telling the caretaker everything that you want that person to know. If the hurt was done when you were a child, then the confident grown-up you – who is not afraid of that person – takes the shy, scared child onto your lap and has the child tell it all.

- Write down positive things that the caretaker has done for you. If there are none, that's okay. If you keep thinking, you may remember something kind that he or she has done for you.

- Lastly, practice telling the caretaker that you forgive him or her, because he or she did not know any better.

Healing Unfinished Business with My Caretaker Worksheet

What do I feel are my unresolved issues with a caretaker?

Healing steps I plan to take:

The Forgiveness Exercise with an Abuser Worksheet

A WORD OF CAUTION: Be aware that these exercises may bring up uncomfortable feelings, psychological or physical pain, and memories, and are no substitute for professional treatment. You may want to consult with a qualified medical, psychiatric or psychological professional beforehand. If at any time they are disturbing to you, you should stop immediately and *seriously consider seeking the assistance of a professionally trained therapist to support you in productively working through this material.*

- First write down everything you feel that the abuser has done wrong to you. Get it all out. Be as specific as possible.

- Now practice telling the abuser everything that you want that person to know. If the hurt was done when you were a child, then the confident grown-up you – who is not afraid of that person – takes the shy, scared child onto your lap and has the child tell it all.

- Write down positive things that the abuser has done for you. If there are none, that's okay. If you keep thinking, you may remember something kind that he or she has done for you.

- Lastly, practice telling the abuser that you forgive him or her, because he or she did not know any better.

Healing Unfinished Business with an Abuser Worksheet

What do I feel are my unresolved issues with an abuser?

Healing steps I plan to take:

Conclusion

In his book *The Anxiety & Phobia Workbook*, Dr. Edmund J. Bourne writes about the significance of developing one's spirituality. He said, "Spirituality involves the recognition and acceptance of a Higher Power, beyond your own intelligence and will, with whom you can have a relationship. This Higher Power can provide you with inspiration, joy, security, peace of mind, and guidance, far exceeding what is possible in the absence of the belief in a Higher Power."

He further writes, "Spiritual awareness and growth can effect a transformation in your whole being. It can help you develop a basic trust and faith, which is unshakable." Additionally, "As you develop your spirituality, many of your beliefs about the meaning of life in general, and what your life is about specifically, can shift dramatically. These shifts in beliefs can lead to having more compassion and tolerance toward yourself, as well as to finding a deeper meaning in the challenges you face, instead of viewing them as arbitrary and meaningless. You may feel less like a victim who has a particular emotional problem. Instead, you may come to regard your condition as an opportunity to grow and expand who you are."

It is a challenge to remain aware of and be in relationship with our divine source. To me, admitting we have a soul and then taking care of it means spiritual health. How do you take care of it? Find whatever you call a higher power and lay your ego at its feet. Doing this will free your entire being to have faith and trust in something bigger than yourself. It will give you a broader perspective on life and the lessons we are here to learn.

We need to be grateful for everything that happens to us, negative and positive because these experiences are our teachers. This planet is a huge schoolroom – anything that happens can be transformed into something positive by our spiritual beliefs, thoughts, and deeds.

Practicing forgiveness, plus meditating, being grateful, enjoying pets, attending religious or spiritual groups, being of service to others, giving from our heart, and having a connection with nature will enhance our spirituality, reduce our stress, relieve our sorrows, and lighten our hearts.

Resources

Adult Children of Abusive Parents: A Healing Program for Those Who Have Been Physically, Sexually, or Emotionally Abused, by Steven Farmer M.A., M.F.C.C.

If You Had Controlling Parents: How to Make Peace with Your Past and Take Your Place in the World, by Dan Neuharth, Ph.D.

Ghost Mothers: Healing From the Pain of a Mother Who Wasn't Really There by Kathryn Rudlin

About the Author

Carolle Jean-Murat, MD

Born and raised in Haiti from a family with shamanic roots, educated in Haiti, Mexico, Jamaica, and the US, Dr. Carolle Jean-Murat is a medical intuitive, a board-certified gynecologist, and award-winning author. She has over three decades of experience in women's health. Dr. Carolle had a successful holistic private practice as a board-certified Ob-Gyn in San Diego from 1982 until 2005.

Fluent in five languages, she founded the *Dr. Carolle's Healing Sanctuary of San Diego*. She offers phone, in person intuitive consultations and retreats for those who are at a major fork in the road on their life journey, intuitive medical consultations, and expert second opinion to help women and few good men seeking a healthy path to a quality life.

Since 1983, Dr. Carolle has been providing free medical care to underserved women through Catholic Charities, and St. Vincent de Paul Village, in San Diego. In 1993, she founded the non-profit organization, *Health Through Communications Foundation* and its *Angels for Haiti Project* to provide to those in need education, health-care, and hope for the future.

Dr. Carolle frequently travels to La Vallée de Jacmel, Haiti to provide free medical care, medical supplies, develop preventive health programs, and raise money to fund multiple programs such as school gardens, and vocational schools. Especially after many devastating earthquakes and many hurricanes that stroke her beloved country, she tirelessly works to create an infrastructure that will provide a foundation for creating self-sufficient, productive, and thriving communities.

As an international motivational speaker, Dr. Carolle brings her message of self-empowerment through her award-winning books, lectures, workshops, and online courses.

Proceeds from the sale of this book benefit Dr. Carolle's philanthropic work – especially the *Angel For Haiti Project*.

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