

Forgive yourself, *and then everyone else.*

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WHRIA

Women's Health & Research
INSTITUTE OF AUSTRALIA

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SO WHAT IS WHRIA? (PRONOUNCED WI-REE-A)

At WHRIA our aim is to improve your quality of life

Established in 2007, we are a group of caring professionals dedicated to improving women's health through care, research and education.

Our team works together to provide a world-class standard of care in **gynaecology**, **women's hormones** and **pelvic pain**.

We offer the support of pelvic floor physiotherapy, acupuncture, osteopathy, psychology and pain management to provide more choice for women and girls.

Our treatment and education is tailored to each woman, and you always play a large role in the decision-making process about your health.

"From discovery and research innovation to reality".

SOME OF THE ISSUES WHRIA CAN HELP WITH



Bladder and Bowel

- Bladder Pain Syndrome
- Constipation & Straining (adults and kids)
- Incontinence
- Irritable Bowel Syndrome
- Prolapse



Gynaecology

- Check ups
- Children & Teenagers
- Heavy Periods



Pelvic Pain

- Endometriosis
- Painful Sex
- Period Pain
- Pudendal Neuralgia
- Vaginismus
- Vulvar Pain



Fertility

- Asherman's Syndrome
- Contraception
- Pregnancy Planning & Support
- Mirena® fittings in our rooms



Hormones

- Menopause
- Osteoporosis
- PMS & PMDD
- Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome



INTRODUCTION: THE CHATTERING MIND

We live in a time of unprecedented wealth and physical health. However, we don't always manage our emotional well-being very well, especially conflict and past hurts. Many people feel tired, harassed and have a very active worried mind that makes it difficult for them to even stay asleep.

Reorganising life as much as possible, regular holidays, a quiet meditative technique (see the WHRIA booklet, "Mental Stillness"), exercise and a healthy diet all help.

Healing past hurts is also important. Unresolved painful experiences can cycle through the mind, adding negative thoughts to the mind-chatter (which is unpleasant enough). They can also express themselves in many other ways.

Unresolved past hurts may be linked to:

Mood swings, depression and anxiety.

Anger and frustration.

Poor self esteem

Difficulty forming or keeping relationships

Physical illnesses

Chronic pain syndromes

Poor sleep and nightmares

Projection¹

The way you think can cause problems too. For example, many think in very "black and white" terms. This is called "dualistic thinking." This type of thinking classifies the people and events around you into two groups, such as either being in the group or not. Examples include: up or down, male or female, earth or sky and belonging to my group or outsider (not belonging to my group). Many wars and atrocities have been committed against one particular group of humans who have been seen as "outsiders" and not part of the "in" group, religion or tribe.

Dualistic thinking is helpful for rational and scientific matters but unfortunately, life tends to be grey rather than black and white. If you stop and consider this for a moment, there can be a wide space and a lot of choices between a simple, "yes" or "no." This "Middle Way" has been preserved by many ancient traditions.

If someone has hurt you, then you can easily respond by hating them, whilst still loving your own family (do you see the dualism?) in contrast, forgiveness is a middle way path. It is quite different to trying to forget what happened and holding onto unforgiveness, perhaps even hatred. Talking to people, we have found that there is much confusion about forgiveness. First, some aren't sure exactly what forgiveness is. Second, many don't understand the process of forgiveness; that is how to do it. The purpose of this short text is to clarify these two issues.

¹ Projection is a coping mechanism where the person "projects" their anger, frustration and other negative emotions onto other people. Affected individuals accuse others of the very negative attributes that are affecting themselves.

So, let's begin by examining what forgiveness isn't.

WHAT FORGIVENESS ISN'T

Forgiveness is NOT

Forgetting,

Denying the events happened,

Blocking out the problem,

Reconciliation,

Ignoring justice issues or

Condoning the wrong behaviour

In our experience, well meaning friends sometimes tell the injured person to “forget it and get on with their life.” Trying to block out the painful experience is also a common human defence mechanism. This is called, “denial” and is a common response to various types of abuse. Denial works, in so far as it allows the person to function to some extent. But as the time goes by, the repressed pain, anger and frustration make it difficult for the affected individual to form lasting, fulfilling relationships. It can also cause anxiety, depression and even physical conditions. Skilled psychological counselling may be required in these cases.

To be healthy and happy, it is important to first acknowledge, accept and express your emotions (even if only to yourself), not avoid, minimize or deny our emotions. If you have been hurt, abused, or betrayed then it is normal and appropriate to feel sad, abandoned, powerless, anxious, guilt, shame or angry and resentful. Once you have felt and accepted your feelings, you will feel more open and ready to do the forgiveness work.

Reconciliation and forgiveness are often confused.

Reconciliation is where both sides come together to try to resolve the conflict. It requires both sides to co-operate. Forgiveness is one-sided. It requires one person – you - to change your mind. Forgiveness does not require the other person to co-operate.

JUSTICE ISSUES

Watching the TV news at night one can marvel at how often people are confused about justice and forgiveness. Here is a common scenario. Someone has been assaulted and is now in hospital and the assailant is still at large. A relative says to the camera that they can't forgive the assailant until they are brought to justice. The reporter usually nods in agreement.

Now, this is very understandable and many people will need to work through their anger, frustration and grief first, perhaps with a counsellor. Now if the criminal is caught and put in jail, some may feel some closure, but not all. Also, what if the perpetrator is never brought to justice or is let off by the courts on a legal technicality? Or what if they get a lenient sentence? Justice and forgiveness are parallel pathways that can be walked out together but are not dependent on each other.

Yet, continuing to hate the offender basically means that the injured person has placed their spiritual and emotional wellbeing into the hands of the last person of the planet who should have such control. In one



sense, the offender has caused you to make a prison for yourself out of your own pain and suffering. Continuing to hate is like drinking poison and expecting the perpetrator to die. Or like throwing hot coals – your hands get burnt. Feelings of hate and revenge are ultimately useless as it can't alter what was done to you and can't erase the wrongs. It takes a lot of energy to continue to hold onto hate and anger and you won't get punished for your anger but by your anger:

So you can be willing to forgive and if appropriate, seek justice too. In our experience, as you forgive, your mind clears and become much more peaceful and that makes it easier to deal with legal or moral matters.

FORGIVENESS IS A PROCESS

Forgiveness is not always easy if the wrong done to us was a rejection, a deception, a lie, a betrayal, a theft and certainly it is very hard to forgive a sexual assault or a murder or abuse or neglect and in those cases, some people may never be able to forgive. Yet when we are ready to grieve the past and accept life as it is and that bad things do happen in this world, we may be ready to bring the process of inner healing. Forgiveness is a process with a beginning, a middle and an end. Often, the hardest step is the first one.

Forgiveness is the process of letting go of the emotions and judgements surrounding a painful event.

It is a deliberate act of choice to reflect on the distressing event and process it.

As thoughts precede emotions and actions, our thoughts are a first step.

Even after the most painful situations, you can still choose the thoughts and images you put in your mind. You have freedom to choose how you think and how you act. If you choose a positive mindset, positive emotions will follow.

You can control how you see a situation and refuse to see yourself as a victim.

You can let go of the past and live in the present, choosing happiness and freedom.

If someone has injured you, often negative thoughts cycle through your mind over and over. These may include:

"Why did he / she do that to me!"

"People leave me/hurt me"

"I hate him / her!" "It's all my fault!"

"It's my right to ..."

"I'm worthless / ugly / disgusting / helpless/
not good enough / weak"

"I will never get over this"

Repetitive negative thoughts take the mind into a place where the world is seen through dark, negative glasses. Everything - past, present and future events are seen through this negative mindset. We have met many deeply religious folks who have not had much inner healing and have not connected with love. This is even though their sacred texts talk about love, compassion, not judging others and forgiveness. They are often depressed, anxious, judgemental, critical of others, and full of shame and guilt. Forgiveness is the path to restoration which means it returns you to yourself. So how does forgiveness work?

HOW CAN I FORGIVE?

Forgiveness is a choice. Forgiveness is a process with a beginning and an end.
Forgiveness is like a path in a field.

How do you make a path in a field? By walking back and forth in the same direction. Over time the plants become crushed down and eventually the track becomes deep and rutted in the ground. Unforgiveness is like that. Pessimistic thoughts cycle back and forth reinforcing this mindset. In turn, your emotions and behaviour are affected. You view the world through dark sun-glasses. So, how do you make a new path?

By choosing to change direction.

As you change direction, over time, a new path is established. It also takes a while for the old path to be overgrown and disappear. Forgiveness is the same. As you turn away from the negative thoughts, it takes time for the new mental pathways to strengthen and the old to pass away. And that's alright. Be kind to your self as you go through this process.

Forgiveness takes time. It is like grief and has stages. Like losing a loved one, there is: denial, bargaining, anger, sadness and finally acceptance and forgiveness.

WHAT IF I DON'T KNOW WHAT IS MAKING ME FEEL BAD?

Most people know exactly what and who has upset them. However, there are some who really don't know what is upsetting them. They just know something is there. There are several strategies possible here.

First, start the forgiveness process with the information that you have. You could have a chat with family and friends and see if they can recall some events or people that upset you. Start there. We call this, "pulling the thread." As you start the forgiveness process, often other buried memories rise into consciousness.

Second, consider doing some work with a professional psychologist or counsellor. Again, as you begin the healing process, other issues often rise.

Third, practise a quiet meditative method (see the WHRIA booklet on Mental Stillness). It is very common for buried painful thoughts to surface during meditation. Some meditation teachers call this "evacuation." Some people have told us that they have asked God to show them their hidden past experiences and these hidden memories have appeared soon after their prayer.



YOU NEED TO FORGIVE YOURSELF OR GOD?

This may seem a little strange at first. However, you should consider three possible people you may need to forgive - the person who upset or hurt you, yourself and sometimes God. For example, it is not unusual for a woman who was raped in the past, to blame herself for going to "that bar or club," meaning that if she hadn't gone there then she wouldn't have been raped. Of course, none of that is true. These women need to forgive themselves.

Lastly, we have heard from some devout people, "Where was God when this happened?"

Of course, God isn't the problem. God was probably right next to them weeping with them. Rather the offending person used their free will to violate the other's free will. In both of these examples, forgiveness is important.

HOW DO I BEGIN THE PATH OF FORGIVENESS?

The process of forgiveness begins with a thought and then a choice. There are a number of ways to begin to forgive.

Beginnings

You could begin by speaking out forgiveness. Remember, you don't involve the other person, you can speak forgiveness in the seclusion of your bedroom or study. Here are some other examples that our patients have told us that they used:

One client told one of us that she was walking along a beach, stopped and picked up a rock that for some reason, reminded her of the person who had wounded her. She gave the rock a talking to and then threw it into the water.

Another, rather artistic patient told one of us that she bought three helium filled balloons and painted the faces of the people who had hurt her on the balloons. She then told each how they had injured her, spoke words of forgiveness, then let them fly up into the air.

Yet another person told us that she went on a healing retreat which culminated with her walking out into a field with her counsellor, digging a hole, speaking her words into the hole, then covering it up.

You could write a letter (not to be posted)

Writing a letter to the person is therapeutic for you. So first, write your feelings, thoughts and experiences around the hurt and how it affected you. Keep writing until you feel empty of thoughts.

Then write you have chosen to forgive them and then destroy the letter. You can tear it up, but burning it is one of our personal favourites (as a symbol that the unforgiveness is gone.) Here is a template that you could use:

Letter 1 (Starting with forgiving yourself and then the other person who I will call "Bob"):

Dear me,

*You've been hard on yourself lately. You blamed yourself for And And
I also forgive Bob for what he did to me that day.
I chose to forgive myself and Bob.*

Letter 2 (Starting with forgiving the other person who I will call "Bob")

Dear Bob,

*Your actions on (insert date or year) hurt me physically and hurt my feelings
(tell him how they hurt you).
I also choose to forgive myself for going to
I also forgive God for not protecting me.
(Keep going until you feel empty)*

Then end with – *"I choose to forgive Bob, I forgive myself and I forgive God (if necessary).*

Once you are finished you can tear it up if you wish, but there is a power released by burning it. Perhaps the "burning ceremony" represents the end of the old path of unforgiveness. Sometimes it is helpful to shower; swim or just wash your hands after burning the letter as a symbol of cleansing.

WALKING OUT YOUR FORGIVENESS

Having made a start down the path of forgiveness, you will need to walk it out and this takes time and effort and preparation. Negative thoughts will rise up and so you need to be ready to replace these with positive thoughts. Short affirmations can be used. Examples include:

Examples of positive affirmations:

"I am willing to let go of the past"

"I have forgiven ... (name the person)"

"May (name the person) find healing too."

"I am free."

"I am a forgiver."

"I am a peacemaker."

"Peace, peace, peace."

"We are all doing the best we can with what we know" (sometimes we only learn what we don't know when we are forced to learn it)

"I am loving, kind and compassionate to myself."

"I am happy and grateful for what I have now."

"I let go and let God"

This phase can take weeks or months. But keep going, it is worth it. Every so often you can test how you are going. Pause, recall the other person's face and check your first emotion. Breathe long and slow and relax and smile inwardly. Over time, you will pass through negative feelings – numbness (feeling neutral) – not bothered – feeling sorry for them – perhaps even feeling some warmth.



BARRIERS TO FORGIVENESS

There can be several barriers to forgiveness.

- A world view that says revenge is your right
- Inner vows
- Addictions
- Religious tradition
- Family traditions

Still many parts of the world believe revenge is acceptable behaviour. The problem with revenge is that the hatred and violence simply escalate. Worse still this behaviour is taught to little children and then it becomes generational hatred – a family tradition of the worst type. Some are happy to forgive within their family or tribe but not forgive people outside their group.

Inner vows or core beliefs are promises you make over your life, often in a moment of distress or limited perception that end up controlling your thought life. These might include:

"I'll never be like my father / mother ... " "I am hopeless." "It's my right to ... " "I am worthless ... " "The best defence is a strong offence." "I'll never let my guard down and risk being hurt again." "I'll never be happy and successful." "I'm only going to be loved or worthwhile if I achieve or do things perfectly." "I'm bad/flawed so deserve to be punished."

Furthermore, addictions to money, possessions, gambling, pornography, alcohol, drugs or the Internet can make it difficult to think clearly about many things, including forgiveness.

JUSTICE ISSUES

As mentioned already, forgiveness and justice issues are often confused with many making their forgiving conditional upon some legal or moral conditions being fulfilled first. The role of justice in most societies has at least three aspects – to deter; to rehabilitate and to maintain security. Let's look at some situations:

Problem	Need to forgive	Justice Issues
Injured in a car accident	The other driver	File a police / insurance report
Disobedient child got you angry	The child	Consider boundaries for the child
Someone broke into your house	The thief	Call the police
You didn't get the promotion you thought you deserved	Your boss; the person who got the promotion	Consider the appeals process
A school bully	The bully	Talk to your parents or a teacher
Spouse has an affair	The spouse; the other person	Counselling; reconciliation or separation

Justice and mercy are different and can go hand-in-hand. If someone has injured you, then separate out the justice issues and who you need to forgive. Letting go of the emotional pain actually makes it easier to deal with legal and moral matters with a clear head. If laws have been broken, you may even need to go to the police. In the work place, you probably need to talk to someone higher in authority.

WHAT YOU CAN LEARN AND HOW YOU CAN GROW FROM YOUR FORGIVENESS JOURNEY.

One important lesson learned may be that you survived and can move forward toward possibly revised chosen values, in order to develop a richer, happier and more satisfying life.

You may have strengthened your values or qualities of:

Compassion, patience, beingness, discernment, flexibility, humility, loyalty, empathy, responsibility, emotional and mental strength and unconditional love.

Questions you can ask yourself after being hurt in relationships and learning to forgive:

Did you learn more about your needs and ability to set boundaries with others?

Were you looking for approval and people pleasing or over achieving in order to win love from another rather than from inside yourself?

Was the person who hurt you trying to get their needs met? If so what were their needs?

Why do you think they went about getting their needs met in such a hurtful way?

Was it their jealousy, insecurity, feelings of inadequacy, shame, competition or greed?

Were they abused themselves by violent or insensitive parents when they were young?
(Note: "Hurt people hurt people")

Can you accept that some people are narcissistic, psychopathic, selfish, manipulative and lack empathy and kindness?

Have you learnt to recognize these types of people more now and learnt to stay away from them or be more discriminating with your friendships or partners?

Have you learnt that you cannot change other people?

Have you learnt to accept you are human and make mistakes and have flaws and that's ok?

Have you learnt that you have the power to choose your thoughts and to think more positive and be lighter in spirit- perhaps be more spiritual?

Have you learnt to choose friends/partners who treat you with the respect you deserve?

Have you learnt to be more loving to yourself and build your self-esteem? Even to be happy on your own?

Do you have more appreciation for the people in your life who have always cared about you?

Can you be more grateful for them and what you have now?

CONCLUSION

Forgiveness can be the path for you to release anger, resentment and pain and to find emotional freedom. People who let the wrongdoings in the world bring them down, have lost hope. Those who choose to forgive, trust and believe that everything is happening as its meant to, or for a reason, seem to get over wrongs more quickly. Hope is finding your way out of the darkness and discovering an optimism for a better future. YOU have the power within, to heal by transforming suffering to happiness and inner peace.

There are many examples of people who forgave and changed the world. Some of our personal favourites include Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King. Their biographies are widely available – if you need a little inspiration. Here are some of their words:

"Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." Martin Luther King, Jr.

"The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong." Mahatma Gandhi

"If there are dreams about a beautiful South Africa, there are also roads that lead to their goal. Two of these roads could be named Goodness and Forgiveness." Nelson Mandela

Forgiveness is the path to inner healing and peace. Will you make a start today?



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