

Beth Hemmila

BE FORGIVENESS

*Cultivate Compassion &
Undiscriminating Kindness*

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Printed in the United States of America

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ISBN 978-1-300-81877-9
First Printing: April 2013

*For Hugo,
Thank you for sharing your wisdom of
love, devotion, and forgiveness.*

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How To Use This Book

The forgiveness you seek is waiting to unfold. When you accept forgiveness and offer it to others, a greater peace is shared with the whole world.

Forgiving others as well as yourself is one of the most powerful forms of human connection. This book teaches you how to cultivate both a compassionate heart and forgiving nature.

Suggestions for how to use this book:

- Make copies of the questions on pages 29 – 34 or go to my Web site and print out the *Be Forgiveness Worksheet* and make copies for future use. You can download the worksheet here: bethhemmila.com/freedownloads/
- Keep lists of feelings and needs handy at all times so you can start recognizing how these emotions and desires motivate your actions and reactions. You can make copies of the lists on pages 47 – 52 or print out the lists on the worksheet downloaded from my Web site.
- Read the entire book through once, reviewing the examples, and watching the *Be Forgiveness* video playlist on YouTube found here: youtube.com/user/hintjewelry
- Then return to the beginning of the book and read chapters 1 through 5, practicing all 10 steps using the worksheet and your own trigger event.

Definitions

WHAT IS EMPATHY?

The intellectual identification with or vicarious experiencing of the feelings, thoughts, or attitudes of another.

Empathic connection is an understanding of the heart in which we see the beauty in the other person, the divine energy in the other person, the life that's alive in them.

- Marshall Rosenberg

WHAT IS COMPASSION?

A feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another who is stricken by misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the suffering.

Compassion is that which makes the heart of the good move at the pain of others. It crushes and destroys the pain of others; thus, it is called compassion. It is called compassion because it shelters and embraces the distressed.

- The Buddha

WHAT IS FORGIVENESS?

To cease to blame or hold resentment against someone or something. To grant pardon for a mistake, wrongdoing, etc.

Love the creatures for the sake of God and not for themselves. You will never become angry or impatient if you love them for the sake of God. Humanity is not perfect. There are imperfections in every human being, and you will always become unhappy if you look toward the people themselves. But if you look toward God, you will love them and be kind to them, for the world of God is the world of perfection and complete mercy. Therefore, do not look at the shortcomings of anybody; see with the sight of forgiveness.

- `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*

Personal Notes

READINESS

Don't push the river, it flows by itself.

- Chinese Proverb

If you don't feel ready to forgive, then I recommend waiting and trusting your instincts. The right moment will appear, and you will sense your desire to forgive. Alternatively, you may be ready to forgive, but you are experiencing laziness – like looking up at a huge mountain and feeling overwhelmed by the climb. In this case, you may need to apply self-discipline to your forgiveness process.

SELF-FORGIVENESS & GUILT

Guilt is another way to stay focused on you by beating yourself up. It's possible that when you feel guilty it's a way to avoid change and feeling regret. Working a process of self-forgiveness allows you to feel remorse, accept responsibility, and change your future actions. From my experience, I noticed that sincerely engaging in the habit of self-forgiveness made forgiving another person much more powerful and life transforming. My recommendation is to take this step very seriously.

SURRENDER AGGRESSION

Withholding forgiveness from another or from yourself is a form of aggression. The *Be Forgiveness* process asks that you surrender your whole story – your fixed perception of reality. In truth, you only see a small snippet of how the whole universe is unfolding. By learning to forgive everyone, everything, every day, you will practice surrendering your aggression and experience more and more emotional freedom.

REVENGE & PLEASURE

Science has discovered that when thinking or speaking about revenge, the pleasure center of the brain is activated.

Physiologically, your brain might consider revenge more pleasurable than forgiveness. If you haven't actively exercised your mind to experience the positive aspects of forgiveness, then you might have to use some self-discipline to make forgiveness a habit. By frequently repeating the process, you will learn to replace your brain's addiction to subtle forms of payback with a pattern of compassion and forgiveness.

GRATITUDE

Genuinely appreciating your experiences and seeing how you have benefitted from another person's actions as well as your own is one way to open and soften your heart. By savoring the gratitude that is built into this process, you will learn to see the value in the other person. The more you see the value of another person's life the more you will connect with the love that always exists between your two souls.

LOVING-KINDNESS

The last step in this process of forgiveness extends your loving-kindness to the other person. It's important to work this last step because it replaces the painful part of your memory with something new. This will help free you from re-inscribing the pain over and over in your head.

HIGHER LEVELS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Anger, hate, and sadness are forms of emotional energy that vibrate at very low levels. Love, compassion, and forgiveness vibrate at higher levels and raise your spiritual consciousness.

What Is A Trigger Event?

A trigger event is something that happens in your daily life that stimulates a strong emotional response. It could be something that happened (e.g., a tornado ripped through downtown) or be something someone did or said (e.g., my daughter skipped school, my partner said he hates going to see my parents for the holidays, etc.).

One of the easiest ways to identify a trigger event is by learning to notice when you feel angry, scared, sad, guilty, or ashamed. These large-scale emotional responses signal that something you value is not being met and a deeper message of compassion is hiding below the surface of the event. By noticing your different emotional responses and what you are reacting to, you create an awareness that will naturally foster compassion and the willingness to forgive.

Make A Concrete Observation

Learning the difference between making a concrete observation of an emotionally charged situation and generating a personal evaluation regarding this same experience helps you understand that *your thinking* is the catalyst for many of your reactions – not the event itself.

A neutral or concrete observation answers the questions: who, what, where, when, how long, how often, what was said, or what was done. It does not answer the question “Why?” Your observation is a factual statement, one that helps you distinguish what is most real, as opposed to the emotionally charged storyline your mind chooses to create.

HOW TO MAKE A CONCRETE OBSERVATION

Step 1. In your own words, write a short description of a trigger event that happened in your life. See page 6 for how to spot trigger events.

Step 2. In one brief sentence, edit your description down to its most observable, neutral form. Only include answers to the questions who, what, where, when, how long, how often, what was said, or what was done. For more examples see pages 35 – 44.

TIP

To make a **Concrete Observation**, write a description of what first pops into your head and then eliminate as many words as possible so as to reduce the sentence to its most basic form. Imagine you are writing directions for actors in a play. Keep it simple, clear, precise, and remove emotional content.

EXAMPLE

1. **Trigger Event:** On the phone when I tried to bring up things that my mother did to hurt me in the past, she got really angry and snapped at me, “I can’t talk about feelings. I don’t want to talk about feelings.”
2. **Concrete Observation:** On the phone, my mother said, “I can’t talk about feelings. I don’t want to talk about feelings.”

Acknowledge Your Judgments

What we hate in ourselves, we'll hate in others. To the degree that we have compassion for ourselves, we will also have compassion for others.

- Pema Chödrön, *When Things Fall Apart*

Earlier you learned to step back from an emotionally charged trigger event so as to see it from a neutral perspective. In this chapter, you are going to look underneath your judgments regarding a trigger event in order to find a message of compassion. This personal source of compassion is the key to engaging in the process of forgiveness.

One way to look at judgments is to see them as walls that separate you from loving yourself and others and may prevent others from completely loving you. More importantly, judgments disconnect you from fully understanding your needs or the needs of others.

When you perceive someone or something as “wrong” or “bad,” what you are saying is that the person or situation is not in sync with your deepest needs. More accurately, judgments you have about others are what you don’t like to see in yourself. Judgments are you looking to explore and embrace the most uncomfortable and hidden aspects of your unclaimed nature. If all judgment is self-judgment, then ultimately what you are saying is that you are struggling to accept these same characteristics in yourself.

Making judgments limits your range of perception. If you get lost in the distraction of making judgments without seeing their true meaning, you will miss an opportunity to reconnect with a lost part of yourself and at the same time become blinded to the process of compassion and forgiveness.

HOW TO ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR JUDGMENTS (SHOULD THINKING)

Step 3. Think of one **Judgment** that comes to mind when you remember your trigger event from Step 1 and write it down. Write your **Judgment** using “should” or “shouldn’t” in the sentence, and it will be easier to locate your inner critic.

Step 4. Rewrite your **Judgment** from Step 3 and replace the subject of the sentence with first person singular ‘I’ to create a **Self-Judgment**. Change other personal pronouns to second or third person to reflect your action towards another person. By writing this **Self-Judgment**, you open an emotional doorway to empathy, which will help you understand the other person’s needs.

TIP

To create judgments, let your most critical voice take over and come up with unreasonable or reasonable demands that require change from other people or situations. For clarity, ask yourself, “What did I want most to happen during this situation, and what did I believe needed to be corrected to change it?” By looking at your answers to these questions, you will most likely discover a few judgments. To make sure it is a judgment always include “should” or “shouldn’t” in the sentence.

EXAMPLE

1. **Trigger Event:** On the phone when I tried to bring up things that my mother did to hurt me in the past, she got really angry and snapped at me, “I can’t talk about feelings. I don’t want to talk about feelings.”
2. **Concrete Observation:** On the phone, my mother said, “I can’t talk about feelings. I don’t want to talk about feelings.”
3. **Judgment:** You shouldn’t tell me my feelings are no good.
4. **Self-Judgment:** I shouldn’t tell you your feelings are no good.

Step 5. Prove this **Self-Judgment** from Step 4 true for you by thinking of a specific moment from your past when you behaved or thought in this way. The example you give is **not** related to the original trigger event, but instead a separate memory from your past about something you did or said that may stimulate strong feelings such as shame, embarrassment, disappointment, grief, or regret. It may be a memory where you have struggled to take personal responsibility for your own thoughts, actions, or outcomes.

EXAMPLE

1. **Trigger Event:** On the phone when I tried to bring up things that my mother did to hurt me in the past, she got really angry and snapped at me, “I can’t talk about feelings. I don’t want to talk about feelings.”
2. **Concrete Observation:** On the phone, my mother said, “I can’t talk about feelings. I don’t want to talk about feelings.”
3. **Judgment:** You shouldn’t tell me my feelings are no good.
4. **Self-Judgment:** I shouldn’t tell you your feelings are no good.
5. **I believe this Self-Judgment is true for me when I** was teaching an art class, and I told one of my students that he shouldn’t be so angry all the time. I relocated him to a table in the back of the classroom so he had to sit all by himself.

Uncover A Core Need

Needs are your life's energy (the part of you that is most genuine) seeking fulfillment in the material world. Your personal desires or needs motivate all your behavior. Placed within this context, any action can be understood as a sincere effort to meet a need.

Needs are your true Self telling you how to be your best.

For example, when your child yells, "I hate you!" or your partner forgets an important dinner date, they may not appear like someone who is genuinely trying his or her best to get a need met. However, depending on their level of self-awareness, these behaviors may seem like the only option to fulfill a need for choice.

When you become aware of your underlying needs and how they motivate your actions and reactions, you will begin to see and honor them in others. Listening and valuing your needs as well as those around you taps into a deep reservoir of compassion and opens you up to the process of forgiveness.

Here are some needs that may motivate your behavior. (See page 51 for a longer list of needs.)

LIST OF NEEDS

trust	joy	fun	love	touch
choice	freedom	rest	bonding	respect
self-worth	to learn	peace	purpose	adventure
acceptance	honesty	support	to matter	nurture

HOW TO UNCOVER A CORE NEED

In the beginning, when you are learning to identify your needs, re-experience the event in your imagination and then read different needs from the list. Ask yourself, “If this need was met during the trigger event, would I feel better?” When you read a need from the list, and you feel tension release in your body or uncomfortable feelings subside, it’s possible you have found a core need.

Step 6. Read the personal memory you wrote down in Step 5 under the statement **“I believe this Self-Judgment is true for me when I ...”**

Relive this time from your past. What were you feeling? Use the List of Feelings on page 47 and write down the strongest feeling that relates to this memory. Next use the List of Needs on page 51 and identify what you needed most during this experience. What need motivated your actions? On the worksheet write the down the most important need that motivated your actions and reactions during this past experience.

Example: I felt _____ because I needed _____ .

TIP

Another way to identify a need is to picture transforming the trigger event into your ideal situation and then ask yourself: “If this was the perfect experience, what would it give me? What would it be fulfilling? What matters most to me in this situation?” For example, when you ask your son to take out the trash, and he makes a sarcastic comment, instead imagine your son saying, “I’d be glad to mom.” You may find that your need for support was met in this imagined scenario.

EXAMPLE

1. **Trigger Event:** On the phone when I tried to bring up things that my mother did to hurt me in the past, she got really angry and snapped at me, “I can’t talk about feelings. I don’t want to talk about feelings.”
2. **Concrete Observation:** On the phone, my mother said, “I can’t talk about feelings. I don’t want to talk about feelings.”
3. **Judgment:** You shouldn’t tell me my feelings are no good.
4. **Self-Judgment:** I shouldn’t tell you your feelings are no good.
5. **I believe this Self-Judgment is true for me when I** was teaching an art class, and I told one of my students that he shouldn’t be so angry all the time. I relocated him to a table in the back of the classroom so he had to sit all by himself.
6. **What did I feel and need?** I felt helpless because I needed peace.

Empathy For Others

Sometimes no matter how much you try to understand a trigger event, you can't seem to let it go and move forward. Many times emotional relief only happens when you are able to truly empathize with the other person.

Often a person who is suffering unconsciously inflicts pain on people around them as a way of being heard and understood. This is an important insight to embrace, for if you recognize your own past mistakes that were similar in nature and the needs that motivated your behavior, it's possible that the other person who is currently suffering has the same need.

HOW TO DEVELOP EMPATHY FOR OTHERS

You will use the feeling and need that motivated a similar response in you during a past experience and turn it around to develop empathy for the person who may have been the stimulus for your trigger event. You will then attempt to prove this need true for the other person during the original trigger event. It's not important if your guesses are accurate rather it puts your mind in a place of positive uncertainty, and this opening of your heart allows you to feel empathy for another person's reality whatever it may be.

Step 7. Refer to the statement regarding your **Feeling** and **Need** wrote down in Step 6, and reframe it as a question you are asking the other person from the original trigger event in Step 1.

Example: _____, did you feel _____ because you needed _____ ?

Step 8. Use the question you asked in Step 7 as a way of empathizing with the other person and describe how this **Need** could be true for them in regards to the original trigger event from Step 1.

EXAMPLE

1. **Trigger Event:** On the phone when I tried to bring up things that my mother did to hurt me in the past, she got really angry and snapped at me, “I can’t talk about feelings. I don’t want to talk about feelings.”
2. **Concrete Observation:** On the phone, my mother said, “I can’t talk about feelings. I don’t want to talk about feelings.”
3. **Judgment:** You shouldn’t tell me my feelings are no good.
4. **Self-Judgment:** I shouldn’t tell you your feelings are no good.
5. **I believe this Self-Judgment is true for me when I** was teaching an art class, and I told one of my students that he shouldn’t be so angry all the time. I relocated him to a table in the back of the classroom so he had to sit all by himself.
6. **What did I feel and need?** I felt helpless because I needed peace.
7. **Empathy for Other Person from Step 1 (my mother):** Mom, when we were on the phone, did you feel helpless because you needed peace?

8. **How could this need for peace be true for the other person (my mother)?** From what I can tell, my mom seems uncomfortable engaging in conflict and tries her best to make other people happy. I'm guessing that when people around her are happy these conditions help fulfill her need for peace. When I bring up unhappy memories, this behavior might not meet her need for peace.

Compassion & Forgiveness

*Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
there is a field.*

I'll meet you there.

*When the soul lies down in that grass
the world is too full to talk about.*

*Ideas, language, even the phrase
each other*

doesn't make any sense.

- Rumi

Forgiveness promises freedom. It dissolves unhealthy bonds between you and another person. You can only embark on a path of genuine forgiveness when you have the courage to understand the feelings and needs of the other person and believe in their basic goodness.

To experience true freedom through forgiveness, you must want to alleviate the suffering of another. You have to want the other person's unmet needs such as love, support, and trust that weren't met during the trigger event to be fulfilled in the future. With indiscriminating kindness you have to want the best for the other person. Also, you need to see how you benefitted from this experience. What did you learn about life? What did this person teach you? In this way, you will permanently sever the unhealthy bond that holds you together with this other person and free yourself to receive other forms of love and connection.

In this process of forgiveness, you will not only offer compassion to another but also to yourself, accepting responsibility for your own past mistakes and freeing yourself from guilt and shame.

When you choose to forgive ...

- You live in the present and let go of the past.
- You include everyone in your love.
- You embrace the fragility and imperfection of being human.
- You give up changing others, turn pain into growth, and create more happiness and peace.

TECHNIQUES FOR PROCESSING FORGIVENESS

Empty Chair

Pick a quiet place and sit across from an empty chair. Imagine the person you want to forgive seated across from you in the empty chair. You can speak the words of forgiveness aloud or silently in your head.

Mirror

Sit or stand in front of a mirror and see the reflection of yourself covered by a transparent image of the other person you want to forgive. Say the words of forgiveness aloud to the image in the mirror while looking into your right eye. This is a powerful method for acknowledging that you and the person you want to forgive are in fact one in the same.

Visualize

Sit or lie down and close your eyes. Imagine a serene and beautiful place that brings you comfort and peace. It should be like Rumi's field in the poem – a type of heaven on earth where there is no “wrongdoing and rightdoing.” See you and the person you want to forgive together in this place. Sit across from each other and look into the other person's eyes. You are safe here. Continue with the forgiveness process using your imagination and saying the words silently in your head.

HOW TO FORGIVE

Choose one of the techniques or come up with your own method and follow the steps below.

TIP

If you find it challenging to forgive someone during the forgiveness process, try picturing the other person as a four-year old child. This image of a small child allows you to see the person as another fragile and vulnerable human being, learning and growing just like you. By using this technique you may access more tender feelings, which will naturally lead to compassion and forgiveness.

FORGIVE YOURSELF

Step 9. In your imagination, relive your past memory from Step 5 and 6. Feel the feeling you had during the experience. Acknowledge your underlying need and see that your actions were motivated by this need. Feel a deep, tender yearning to alleviate your suffering regarding this past experience.

Imagine a sphere of pink light surrounding your body, wrapping you in the feeling of love. Say the following words of forgiveness below:

I forgive myself for _____ and
for behaving in a way that may not have fostered love,
kindness, and peace.

I let go of my shame (guilt, regret, etc.) about

_____ .

I see that love is my true nature, and I am a creative part of the universe. I love and accept myself as I am in this moment. I trust in my basic goodness. I know I am more than any action.

I give thanks for _____ .

I embrace my past mistakes as a path to growth. I am ready to be free. I am ready to be happy. I am ready to live.

May I experience _____ by trusting in the love of the universe.

FORGIVE THE OTHER PERSON

Step 10. Reimagine your original trigger event from Step 1 and change places with the other person. Experience the trigger event from the other person's point of view by stepping into their shoes and connecting with their feeling and need from Step 7 and your answers to Step 8. Feel their feelings in your body and the suffering behind their need.

See how you and the other person are one in the same – interconnected by one universal need. Acknowledge that this other person is fragile and imperfect just like you.

In your imagination, see a beam of light connecting you to this other person. You are both bound together by a thread of light. All your unresolved feelings and questions related to the trigger event are contained within this beam of light, which binds you to this person in an unhealthy way. Imagine the other person acknowledging your pain and asking you for your forgiveness.

To untie and free yourself from this person, say the following words of forgiveness:

_____, I forgive you for _____ .

I understand that _____ had nothing to do with our love (care, respect, etc.) for one another.

I let go of my anger (fear, sadness, etc.) over

I see that love is your true nature, and you are a creative part of the universe. I love and accept you as you are in this moment. I trust in your basic goodness. I know you are more than any action.

Thank you for teaching me _____ .

I am ready to be free. I am ready to be happy. I am ready to live.

Compassion & Undiscriminating Kindness

Recall the same tender yearning to alleviate suffering you accessed in Step 9 and express a sincere desire for the other person's need to be fulfilled in the future.

_____, may you experience _____
by knowing a loving universe.

In your imagination, see the other person filled with feelings of happiness, peace and ease. See their need fulfilled and their suffering lifted. Encircle the other person in the pink light of love – cradled by the Divine, where there is only unity. Notice the thread of light tying you and the other person together. Untie the thread from your heart and see it slip away and dissolve into nothingness.

EXAMPLE

1. **Trigger Event:** On the phone when I tried to bring up things that my mother did to hurt me in the past, she got really angry and snapped at me, “I can’t talk about feelings. I don’t want to talk about feelings.”
2. **Concrete Observation:** On the phone, my mother said, “I can’t talk about feelings. I don’t want to talk about feelings.”
3. **Judgment:** You shouldn’t tell me my feelings are no good.
4. **Self-Judgment:** I shouldn’t tell you your feelings are no good.
5. **I believe this Self-Judgment is true for me when I** was teaching an art class, and I told one of my students that he shouldn’t be so angry all the time. I relocated him to a table in the back of the classroom so he had to sit all by himself.
6. **What did I feel and need?** I felt helpless because I needed peace.
7. **Empathy for Other Person from Step 1 (my mother):** Mom, when we were on the phone, did you feel helpless because you needed peace?
8. **How could this need for peace be true for the other person (my mother)?** From what I can tell, my mom seems uncomfortable engaging in conflict and tries her best to make other people happy. I’m guessing that when people around her are happy these conditions help fulfill her need for peace.

When I bring up unhappy memories, this behavior might not meet her need for peace.

9. **My Feeling from Step 6:** Helpless

My Need from Step 6: Peace

I forgive myself for being insensitive to the feelings and needs of a student and for behaving in a way that may not have fostered love, kindness, and peace. I let go of my guilt about not treating a student with understanding. I see that love is my true nature, and I am a creative part of the universe. I love and accept myself as I am in this moment. I trust in my basic goodness. I know I am more than any action. I give thanks for this opportunity to appreciate the vulnerability of another. I embrace my past mistakes as a path to growth. I am ready to be free. I am ready to be happy. I am ready to live. May I experience peace by trusting in the love of the universe.

10. **Other Person's Feeling from Step 7:** Helpless

Other Person's Need from Step 7: Peace

Mom, I forgive you for not wanting to talk about feelings with me. I understand that you not wanting to talk about feelings had nothing to do with our love for one another. I let go of my anger about you not wanting to connect through feelings. I see that love is your true nature, and you are a creative part of the universe. I love and accept you as you are in this moment. I trust in your basic goodness. I know you are more than any action. Thank you for teaching me how to care for and respect other people's emotional boundaries. I am ready to be free. I am ready to be happy. I am ready to live. Mom, may you experience peace by knowing a loving universe.

Be Forgiveness Worksheet

1. **Describe Your Trigger Event**

2. **Make a Concrete Observation** (Who, What, Where, When, How long, How often, What was said, or What was done)

3. Write a JUDGMENT

You should/shouldn't

4. Rewrite Judgment as a SELF-JUDGMENT

I should/shouldn't

**5. I believe this SELF-JUDGMENT is true for me
when I ...**

As we learn to have compassion for ourselves, the circle of compassion for others – what and whom we can work with, and how – becomes wider.
- Pema Chödrön, *When Things Fall Apart*

6. What did I FEEL and NEED when this SELF-JUDGMENT was true for me?

I felt _____ because

I needed _____ .

**7. Empathy for Other Person from Step 1
(Enter FEELING & NEED from Step 6):**

_____, did you feel _____

because you needed _____ ?

**8. How could this NEED for _____
be true for the other person?**

9. Forgive Yourself

Your FEELING from Step 6: _____

Your NEED from Step 6: _____

Relive your past memory from Step 5 and 6. Feel the feeling in your body. Acknowledge your underlying need. See that your actions were motivated by a need. Feel a deep, tender yearning to alleviate your suffering regarding this past experience.

Imagine a sphere of pink light surrounding your body, wrapping you in the feeling of love. Say the following words of forgiveness below:

I forgive myself for _____
and for behaving in a way that may not have fostered love,
kindness, and peace.

I let go of my shame (guilt, regret, etc.) about

_____ .

I see that love is my true nature, and I am a creative part of the universe. I love and accept myself as I am in this moment. I trust in my basic goodness. I know I am more than any action.

I give thanks for _____ .

I embrace my past mistakes as a path to growth. I am ready to be free. I am ready to be happy. I am ready to live.

May I experience _____
by trusting in the love of the universe.

10. Forgive the Other Person

Other person's FEELING from Step 7: _____

Other person's NEED from Step 7: _____

Reimagine the trigger event from Step 1 from the point of view of the other person's feelings and needs using your answers to Step 7 and 8. Feel the feelings of this person and see the fragile nature of their need. See the other person ask you for your forgiveness.

Imagine a thread of light tying you and the other person together. Free yourself by saying these words of forgiveness below:

_____, I forgive you for _____.

I understand that _____
had nothing to do with our love (care, respect, etc.) for one another.

I let go of my anger (fear, sadness, etc.) about

_____.

I see that love is your true nature, and you are a creative part of the universe. I love and accept you as you are in this moment. I trust in your basic goodness. I know you are more than any action.

Thank you for teaching me _____.

I am ready to be free. I am ready to be happy. I am ready to live.

Compassion & Undiscriminating Kindness

Recall the same tender yearning to alleviate suffering you developed in Step 9 for yourself and express a sincere desire for the other person's NEED to be fulfilled in the future:

_____, may you experience _____
by knowing a loving universe.

In your imagination, see the other person filled with feelings of happiness, peace and ease. See their need fulfilled and their suffering lifted. Encircle the other person in the pink light of love – cradled by the Divine, where there is only unity. Notice the thread of light tying you and the other person together. Untie the thread from your heart and see it slip away and dissolve into nothingness.

More Examples

Here are some more examples of forgiveness written by participants in my workshops.

ADDICTION

This childhood memory was shared by Cynthia, a thirty-two year old recovering alcoholic, working the Twelve-Steps.

1. **Trigger Event:** My dad got really drunk at a party, and when my mom insisted that she drive us home, he got angry at her and demanded she hand over the keys to the car.
2. **Concrete Observation:** After a party where my dad was drinking beer, my mom said she wanted to drive us home, and my dad asked for the keys to the car.
3. **Judgment:** She should have protected me from a potentially dangerous situation.
4. **Self-Judgment:** I should have protected you from a potentially dangerous situation.
5. **I believe this Self-Judgment is true for me when I** was a teenager, I use to get intoxicated with my boyfriend and then go drag racing. I didn't bother to think about how we might get in an accident and hurt other people.
6. **What did I feel and need?** I felt torn because I needed love.
7. **Empathy for Other Person from Step 1 (my mother):** Mom, when dad asked for the keys to the car, did you feel torn because you needed love?

8. **How could this need for love be true for the other person (my mother)?** It's possible my mom didn't want to risk my dad getting mad at her and withdrawing his love.
9. **My Feeling from Step 6: Torn**
My Need from Step 6: Love
I forgive myself for drinking and driving and for behaving in a way that may not have fostered love, kindness, and peace. I let go of my guilt about driving while intoxicated. I see that love is my true nature, and I am a creative part of the universe. I love and accept myself as I am in this moment. I trust in my basic goodness. I know I am more than any action. I give thanks for learning compassion for addictive behavior. I embrace my past mistakes as a path to growth. I am ready to be free. I am ready to be happy. I am ready to live. May I experience love by trusting in the love of the universe.
10. **Other Person's Feeling from Step 7: Torn**
Other Person's Need from Step 7: Love
Mom, I forgive you for giving the car keys to dad after he had been drinking. I understand that letting dad drive after he had been drinking had nothing to do with our love for one another. I let go of my anger about you not driving us home instead. I see that love is your true nature, and you are a creative part of the universe. I love and accept you as you are in this moment. I trust in your basic goodness. I know you are more than any action. Thank you for teaching me that other people's actions may be about self-preservation. I am ready to be free. I am ready to be happy. I am ready to live. Mom, may you experience love by knowing a loving universe.

LOSS OF WORK

This was written by Sandy, a forty-three year old administrative assistant, who was let go from her job two years ago. Afterwards she found a job that suited her better, but she still struggles with issues of self-esteem over the experience.

1. **Trigger Event:** My crazy boss fired me not because I wasn't doing a good job, but because I wanted to improve our efficiency and make the work environment better.
2. **Concrete Observation:** My boss said, "I'm sorry, I don't believe our company is mature enough to be as professional and organized as you want it to be. You're good at what you do, but I'm just afraid we can't meet your needs."
3. **Judgment:** You shouldn't have gotten rid of me.
4. **Self-Judgment:** I shouldn't have gotten rid of you.
5. **I believe this Self-Judgment is true for me when I** stopped hanging out with my girlfriend because she was always changing our plans at the last minute, showing up late or not at all.
6. **What did I feel and need?** I felt worn out because I needed stability.
7. **Empathy for Other Person from Step 1 (my boss):** Sarah, when you said you couldn't meet my needs, did you feel worn out because you needed stability?
8. **How could this need for stability be true for the other person (my boss)?** It's possible that her small company was growing more rapidly than she had the skill set to manage. Maybe she needed a type of stability that comes by

not making any dramatic changes concerning workflow and organization until she felt more confident about how to manage her business.

9. **My Feeling from Step 6: Worn Out**

My Need from Step 6: Stability

I forgive myself for not hanging out with my girlfriend anymore and for behaving in a way that may not have fostered love, kindness, and peace. I let go of my guilt about not hanging out with my girlfriend. I see that love is my true nature, and I am a creative part of the universe. I love and accept myself as I am in this moment. I trust in my basic goodness. I know I am more than any action. I give thanks for seeing my own frailties. I embrace my past mistakes as a path to growth. I am ready to be free. I am ready to be happy. I am ready to live. May I experience stability by trusting in the love of the universe.

10. **Other Person's Feeling from Step 7: Worn Out**

Other Person's Need from Step 7: Stability

Sarah, I forgive you for letting me go from my job. I understand that letting me go from my job had nothing to do with our respect for one another. I let go of my shame about being let go. I see that love is your true nature, and you are a creative part of the universe. I love and accept you as you are in this moment. I trust in your basic goodness. I know you are more than any action. Thank you for teaching me that being rejected is sometimes a blessing in disguise. I am ready to be free. I am ready to be happy. I am ready to live. Sarah, may you experience stability by knowing a loving universe.

VIOLENCE

This is from a memory that still haunted Rachel a fifty-five year old nurse who lives alone.

1. **Trigger Event:** When the drug addict attacked me in the elevator of my apartment complex and stole all the money from my wallet.
2. **Concrete Observation:** When a man in the elevator of my apartment complex hit me in the face with his fist and removed twenty-five dollars from my wallet.
3. **Judgment:** You shouldn't have hurt me.
4. **Self-Judgment:** I shouldn't have hurt you.
5. **I believe this Self-Judgment is true for me when I** put my dog with cancer to sleep instead of continuing the course of medical treatment.
6. **What did I feel and need?** I felt desperate because I needed relief from suffering.
7. **Empathy for Other Person from Step 1 (man in the elevator):** Friend, when we were in the elevator, did you feel desperate because you needed relief from suffering?
8. **How could this need for relief from suffering be true for the other person (man in the elevator)?** This man had red, blood shot eyes and seemed extremely agitated like he hadn't slept in weeks or needed food. Physically he appeared to be suffering. I'm guessing that he needed money to relieve some kind of suffering related to nourishment or drugs.

9. **My Feeling from Step 6: Desperate**
My Need from Step 6: Relief from Suffering
I forgive myself for putting my dog to sleep and for behaving in a way that may not have fostered love, kindness, and peace. I let go of my guilt about putting my dog to sleep. I see that love is my true nature, and I am a creative part of the universe. I love and accept myself as I am in this moment. I trust in my basic goodness. I know I am more than any action. I give thanks for learning more about grieving a loss. I embrace my past mistakes as a path to growth. I am ready to be free. I am ready to be happy. I am ready to live. May I experience relief from suffering by trusting in the love of the universe.
10. **Other Person's Feeling from Step 7: Desperate**
Other Person's Need from Step 7: Relief from Suffering
Friend, I forgive you for hitting me and taking my money. I understand that hitting me and taking my money had nothing to do with our regard for one another. I let go of my fear about you hitting me and taking my money. I see that love is your true nature, and you are a creative part of the universe. I love and accept you as you are in this moment. I trust in your basic goodness. I know you are more than any action. Thank you for teaching me how to trust my instincts and be more aware of my environment. I am ready to be free. I am ready to be happy. I am ready to live. Friend, may you experience relief from suffering by knowing a loving universe.

CRITICISM

This was a recent experience between Joy a thirty-eight year old graphic designer and her manager.

1. **Trigger Event:** During my review, my manager gave me a backhanded compliment about my accuracy, but it seemed more like a tactic meant to shame me into working faster not better.
2. **Concrete Observation:** When my manager said, “Your accuracy is great, we just need you to speed up.”
3. **Judgment:** You should see the wisdom in my way of doing things.
4. **Self-Judgment:** I should see the wisdom in your way of doing things.
5. **I believe this Self-Judgment is true for me when I** criticized my husband’s way of diving into our plumbing problem without coming up with a plan first.
6. **What did I feel and need?** I felt anxious because I needed reassurance.
7. **Empathy for Other Person from Step 1 (my manager):** Mary, when you mentioned I needed to be faster, did you feel anxious because you needed reassurance?
8. **How could this need for reassurance be true for the other person (my manager)?** My manager had to deal with a lot of people coming and going from a small organization in a short period of time.

I'm guessing this change was putting a lot of stress on her willingness to trust in the ability and learning styles of new employees. Also, this company is always running behind on their deadlines, so maybe people working faster reassures my manager that all the work will get done and things will be more balanced.

9. **My Feeling from Step 6:** Anxious

My Need from Step 6: Reassurance

I forgive myself for criticizing my husband's way of working and for behaving in a way that may not have fostered love, kindness, and peace. I let go of my guilt about criticizing my husband's way of working. I see that love is my true nature, and I am a creative part of the universe. I love and accept myself as I am in this moment. I trust in my basic goodness. I know I am more than any action. I give thanks for this chance to see my husband anew. I embrace my past mistakes as a path to growth. I am ready to be free. I am ready to be happy. I am ready to live. May I experience reassurance by trusting in the love of the universe.

10. **Other Person's Feeling from Step 7:** Anxious

Other Person's Need from Step 7: Reassurance

Mary, I forgive you for not valuing and trusting my working style. I understand that not valuing and trusting my way of working had nothing to do with our respect for one another. I let go of my anger about you not valuing my working style. I see that love is your true nature, and you are a creative part of the universe. I love and accept you as you are in this moment. I trust in your basic goodness. I know you are more than any action. Thank you for teaching me patience and that I need to look for ways to honor my own working style. I am ready to be free. I am ready to be happy. I am ready to live. Mary, may you experience reassurance by knowing a loving universe.

LOSS OF RELATIONSHIP

This break-up happened over twenty years ago to Sally a forty-six year old happily married mother of three kids. However, she still felt like there was unfinished business between her and Peter a former lover.

1. **Trigger Event:** When my fiancé yelled at me that he no longer loved me and didn't think we should get married.
2. **Concrete Observation:** When my fiancé said, "I don't want to get married."
3. **Judgment:** You should keep your promises.
4. **Self-Judgment:** I should keep my promises.
5. **I believe this Self-Judgment is true for me when I** made a promise to take over the care of my friend's cat Tiger, but had to give him up because he didn't get along with my other two cats.
6. **What did I feel and need?** I felt overwhelmed because I needed support.
7. **Empathy for Other Person from Step 1 (my fiancé):** Peter, did you feel overwhelmed because you needed support?
8. **How could this need for support be true for the other person (my fiancé)?** My fiancé was studying for his medical boards. I'm guessing he was under a lot of personal pressure to do well, and my actions at the time were distracting him from his studies. He probably needed my support instead of emotional distractions.

9. **My Feeling from Step 6: Overwhelmed**

My Need from Step 6: Support

I forgive myself for giving up my cat Tiger and for behaving in a way that may not have fostered love, kindness, and peace. I let go of my guilt about giving up my cat Tiger. I see that love is my true nature, and I am a creative part of the universe. I love and accept myself as I am in this moment. I trust in my basic goodness. I know I am more than any action. I give thanks for the opportunity to learn how to support limits. I embrace my past mistakes as a path to growth. I am ready to be free. I am ready to be happy. I am ready to live. May I experience support by trusting in the love of the universe.

10. **Other Person's Feeling from Step 7: Overwhelmed**

Other Person's Need from Step 7: Support

Peter, I forgive you for breaking our engagement. I understand that breaking our engagement had nothing to do with our love for one another. I let go of my sadness about breaking our engagement. I see that love is your true nature, and you are a creative part of the universe. I love and accept you as you are in this moment. I trust in your basic goodness. I know you are more than any action. Thank you for teaching me to accept responsibility for my own actions and to see that my behavior has consequences. I am ready to be free. I am ready to be happy. I am ready to live. Peter, may you experience support by knowing a loving universe.

Activate Your Imagination

After you've finished forgiving yourself and someone else, try imagining your memories from a new point of view.

In this exercise, you will activate your imagination so as to uncover the positive feelings hidden beneath your unmet need. When you see that the real motivation for meeting a need is to access positive feelings, you may develop even more empathy for the person you want to forgive from your original trigger event.

HOW TO ACTIVATE YOUR IMAGINATION

1. In regards to your own past memory from Step 5 and 6, where you may have acted in a way that was unkind, ask yourself: What would I have felt if my need had been met? (Use the list of positive feelings words on page 49.)
2. Next remember your original trigger event and see the person you want to forgive. Notice that you and this person may have had the same unmet need during these two separate memories. What if their need had been fulfilled during the original trigger event and they felt the same positive feelings? Can you see that you were both trying to fulfill not only this same need but also hoping to bring these positive feelings into your life?
3. Imagine the person from your original trigger event feeling these positive feelings and having them become a vital part of their life. Ponder the following questions:
 - What is their life like when this need is always met?
 - What do they look like? How do they act?
 - How do they relate to others?

EXAMPLE

When I was teaching an art class, and I told one of my students that he shouldn't be so angry all the time. I relocated him to a table in the back of the classroom so he had to sit all by himself.

What did I feel and need? I felt helpless because I needed peace.

What would I have felt if my need for peace had been met? Confident, easygoing, openhearted, loving, and kind

Original Trigger Event: On the phone when I tried to bring up things that my mother did to hurt me in the past, she got really angry and snapped at me, "I can't talk about feelings. I don't want to talk about feelings."

Empathy for Other Person (my mother): Mom, when we were on the phone, did you feel helpless because you needed peace?

Mom, if your need for peace had been met while we were on the phone, would you have felt confident, easygoing, openhearted, loving, and kind?

List of Feeling Words: What do I feel when my needs ARE NOT met?

Scared

Frightened
Mistrustful
Bewildered
Disturbed
Startled
Shocked
Afraid
Dread
Unsafe
Alarmed
Freaked Out
Worried
Terrified
Concerned
Panicky

Sad

Disappointed
Discouraged
Disheartened
Depressed
Hopeless
Despair
Sullen
Gloomy
Unhappy
Dejected
Morose
Bummed Out
Glum
Rotten

Irritated

Cranky
Crabby
Grouchy
Impatient
Dissatisfied
Frustrated
Aggravated
Annoyed
Agitated
Thwarted
Impotent
Grumpy

Pain

Grief
Hurt
Lonely
Miserable
Devastated
Desperate
Heartbroken
Bereaved
Troubled
Achy

Angry

Disgruntled
Resentful
Furious
Enraged
Upset
Hateful
Mean
Mad
Irate

Hostile

Dislike
Disgusted
Repulsed
Grossed Out
Contempt
Horrificed
Defiant
Antagonistic
Hateful

This word list is based on the work of Marshall B. Rosenberg and the
Center for Nonviolent Communication, www.cnvc.org.

Anxious

Tense
Nervous
Overwhelmed
Stressed
Jittery
Stiff
Moody
Edgy
Touchy
Out of Sorts
Uptight

Confused

Uncertain
Ambivalent
Lost
Hesitant
Torn
Puzzled
Unsure
Spacey
Indecisive
Shy

Jealous

Envious
Bitter
Longing
Yearning
Nostalgic

Exhausted

Tired
Sleepy
Fuzzy
Depleted
Sick
Worn Out
Listless
Burnt Out
Beat
Weary
Slow

Sensitive

Fragile
Shaky
Defensive
Insecure
Humiliated
Helpless
Leery
Guarded

Uncomfortable

Restless
Uneasy
Unnerved
Surprised

Detached

Bored
Disconnected
Distracted
Withdrawn
Reserved
Lifeless
Aloof
Numb
Dull

Guilty

Self-Conscious
Embarrassed
Ashamed
Awkward
Regret
Dirty
Unworthy

List of Feeling Words: What do I feel when my needs ARE met?

Happy

Optimistic
Good Humored
Hopeful
Joyful
Delighted
Cheerful
Glad
Elated
Pleased
Giddy
Jubilant
Easygoing
Lighthearted
Sunny

Confident

Hopeful
Empowered
Responsible
Intelligent
Approachable
Adequate
Fulfilled
Satisfied
Complete
Content
Honest
Open
Proud
Solid

Healthy

Open minded
Genuine
Alive
Radiant
Beautiful
Lively
Vibrant
Upbeat
Glowing
Youthful
Active
Bright
Strong
Mature
Natural

Relaxed

Calm
Rested
Mellow
Rejuvenated
Refreshed
Comfortable
Tolerant

Safe

Relieved
Connected
Secure
Assured
Trusting
Reliable
Certain

Focused

Alert
Awake
Productive
Conscientious
Adaptable
Clearheaded

This word list is based on the work of Marshall B. Rosenberg and the
Center for Nonviolent Communication, www.cnvc.org.

Loving

Affectionate
Understanding
Friendly
Welcoming
Empathetic
Warm
Openhearted
Compassionate
Supportive
Sympathetic
Fervent
Helpful
Caring
Kind

Grateful

Thankful
Appreciative
Admiring
Gracious
Moved
Tender
Touched
Expansive
Humble
Giving
Sharing
Sincere

Excited

Thrilled
Exhilarated
Engaged
Energetic
Stimulated
Aroused
Exuberant
Ecstatic
Overjoyed
Animated
Dazzled
Eager

Adventurous

Amused
Courageous
Resourceful
Spontaneous
Creative
Brave
Playful
Passionate
Enthusiastic
Motivated
Invigorated
Outgoing
Carefree
Daring
Free
Bold

Peaceful

Harmonious
Balanced
Graceful
Serene
Gentle
Flowing
Centered
Blissful
Whole
At Ease
Tranquil
Quiet
Still
Light

Fascinated

Curious
Wonder
Intrigued
Amazed
Enchanted
Interested
Absorbed

List of Needs: What do I need to be my best self?

Connection	Purpose	Nurture
To be Understood	Meaning	Affection
To Be Known	Intention	Warmth
Appreciation	Self-Worth	Caring
Shared Values	Competence	Self-Care
Consideration	Contribution	Bonding
Acceptance	Recognition	Comfort
Conversation	To Be Effective	Self-Empathy
Social Interaction	To Accomplish	Empathy
Mutuality	To Be Valued	Food/Water
Feedback	To Matter	Exercise
To Listen	To Share	Sleep
To Be Heard	To Serve	Rest
To See		

Peace	Growth	Play
Wholeness	To Learn	Curiosity
Relaxation	To Practice	Laughter
Balance	Healthy Risks	Humor
Optimism	Change	Movement
Stillness	To Discover	Happiness
Beauty	Information	Spontaneity
Clarity	To Understand	Adventure
Quiet	Challenge	Pleasure
Calmness	Goals	Energy
Order	Focus	Fun
Ease	Birth	Joy

This word list is based on the work of Marshall B. Rosenberg and the *Center for Nonviolent Communication*, www.cnvc.org.

Security

Trust
 Stability
 Reassurance
 Emotional Safety
 Physical Safety
 Consistency
 Dependability
 Accountability
 Responsibility
 Leadership
 Protection

Expression

To Share Stories
 To Be Creative
 To Be Seen
 To Teach
 To Invent
 To Reinvent
 To Envision
 To Build
 To Inspire
 To Talk

Independence

Individuality
 Empowerment
 To Be Separate
 Time to Think
 Self-Reliance
 Freedom
 Options
 Choice
 Space

Authenticity

Honesty
 Integrity
 Thoughtfulness
 Awareness
 Self-Respect
 Respect
 Patience
 Tolerance
 Fairness
 Truth

Spirituality

Compassion
 Communion
 Groundedness
 Reconciliation
 To Rejoice
 Forgiveness
 Harmony
 Healing
 Hope
 Faith

Celebration

Honor
 To Praise
 To Offer Thanks
 To Give
 Shared History
 Shared Culture
 Reunion
 Mourning
 Aliveness

Intimacy

Love
 Closeness
 Relationship
 Sensuality
 Sexuality
 Support
 Touch
 To Embrace

Belonging

Companionship
 Collaboration
 Community
 Cooperation
 Participation
 Partnership
 Friendship
 Inclusion