

Learning Self-Forgiveness

Objective

To identify a mistake or choice you regret and begin the process of self-forgiveness.

What to Know

Everyone makes mistakes, and the trick is to move forward following poor choices or mistakes – rather than dwelling on them and beating yourself up. It might be painful or uncomfortable, and will include self-forgiveness, which involves accepting responsibility for your actions without making excuses or beating yourself up. Forgiving yourself requires self-compassion, kindness, and self-understanding.

Research indicates that people who practice self-forgiveness have better mental and emotional health, more positive attitudes, and healthier relationships. Lack of self-forgiveness leads to an increase in stress, pessimism, anxiety, depression, or substance abuse.

There is a simple 4-step process you can use to forgive yourself, called the “4 R's of Self-Forgiveness:”

- 1. Accept Responsibility.** Forgiving yourself isn't just about moving on and letting go of the past; it also includes accepting responsibility for your part in what happened. Facing what you have done or what happened is the first step in forgiving yourself. It might be the most difficult step for you. If you've been making excuses, rationalizing, or justifying your actions, it's time to take responsibility.
- 2. Express Remorse.** You'll probably experience a range of emotions, including guilt and shame. These feelings are normal and can lead to positive behavior change. Use a journal or write a letter to increase your self-awareness and express your regret.
- 3. Repair the Damage and Restore Trust.** Making amends is an important part of self-forgiveness. One way to release guilt is to take action to rectify your mistake. Apologize and identify ways you can make it up to whomever you have hurt. This step might appear to benefit only the person you've harmed, but repairing the damage means *you* can begin to move on.
- 4. Focus on Renewal.** Rumination, self-hatred, or self-pity is damaging to your self-esteem and motivation. Forgiving yourself requires learning from the experience and growing as a person. So, begin to understand why you made the choice or behaved the way you did. Reflect on what you can do to prevent similar choices or behaviors in the future.

This worksheet will help you identify a mistake or choice you have made and begin the process of self-forgiveness.

What to Do

Answer the following questions.

Describe the mistake or choice you made that hurt another person.

Why did you make the choice or behave as you did?

What are some things you say to yourself regarding this situation?

How do you feel about yourself?

Are you able and willing to recognize, accept, and own your feelings? Y / N

Why or why not?

Indicate the percentage of guilt and shame you feel (out of 100%).

Guilt (regret about you have done): ____%

Shame (feeling unworthy, undeserving, and deficient): ____%

Is your guilt appropriate? Y / N

Explain your answer.

On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 = extremely low, and 10 = very high, rate your self-esteem: _____

As you examine how you feel about yourself, you might realize that beneath your feelings of guilt, shame, or other unhealthy reactions that there are untrue beliefs you hold about yourself. Some of these beliefs might have been based on what others said to you. Can you identify any of these false beliefs? If so, write them down.

Are you willing to release these beliefs? Why or why not?

Are you willing to take responsibility for your actions? Y / N

What can you do to take responsibility?

Is there anyone you need to make amends with? If so, who? Write down the name(s).

What did you learn from this experience?

Reflect on what you can do to prevent similar choices or behaviors in the future.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
