

Practicing Forgiveness Using the REACH Technique

Objective

To use the REACH technique to forgive someone who wronged you.

What to Know

Dr. Everett Worthington, a leading researcher in forgiveness, created the easy-to-remember REACH model of emotional forgiveness. Along with empathy and commitment, this technique includes other elements for effectively forgiving someone who wronged you.

Everett describes two types of forgiveness.

- **“Decisional” forgiveness** involves deciding to forgive and letting go of angry and resentful thoughts and feelings toward the person who wronged you.
- **“Emotional” forgiveness** involves replacing negative emotions with positive feelings like compassion, sympathy, and empathy.

Research indicates that emotional forgiveness offers positive health benefits because it reduces stressful reactions to and rumination about wrongdoings. The REACH technique stresses emotional forgiveness, and each step is applied to the offense or wrongdoing.

1. **R**ecall the hurt. First, acknowledge you were hurt. Consciously decide to forgive and avoid seeking revenge against the person that hurt you.
2. **E**mpathize. Pretend the person who hurt you is sitting in front of you and talk to them. Fully explain how you feel. Once you have had your say, change roles. Talk back as if you are the other person explaining why they wronged you. This builds empathy – even if you cannot empathize, this process can help you move on.
3. Offer an **A**ltruistic gift. Offer forgiveness as a gift to the person. You can probably recall a time when you wronged someone, and the person forgave you. When you forgive you offer that same gift to the person who hurt you.
4. **C**ommit. Once you have forgiven, write a note to yourself. It can be as simple as, “Today, I forgave _____ for hurting me.”
5. **H**old on to forgiveness. You might doubt that you actually forgave the person or find yourself becoming angry or resentful at some point. Re-read your note to remind yourself that you are committed to forgiveness. You can also work through this process again.

This worksheet will help you practice the REACH technique to forgive someone who wronged you.

What to Do

Think about someone you would like to forgive. Use the REACH technique and answer the following questions.

1. **R**ecall the hurt. Close your eyes and think about the wrongdoing or offense. In your mind, picture the person involved. What are they doing and saying? What happened? Remember to breathe deeply and remain calm as you review the details of what happened. Use the space below to write about your experience.

2. **E**mpathize. People often act in hurtful ways when they feel threatened, afraid, or hurt. Try to imagine what the person was thinking and feeling when they hurt you. Do your best to write an explanation for their actions (*this step might be difficult*).

It is helpful to take the perspective of the other person when you are developing empathy. Since this is the most difficult step in the process, the following prompts might help you.

Pressures. What situational pressures made the person behave the way they did?

Past. What background factors contributed to the person acting the way they did?

Personality. What events in the person's life may have led them to develop the personality they have?

Provocations. What were your own provocative behaviors? Might the other person have perceived something you did as a provocation?

Plans. Did the person have good intentions? Did they want to help you?

Write down your thoughts after reflecting on the above questions.

3. Offer an **A**ltruistic gift of forgiveness. Remember a time when you were forgiven by another person. Describe what happened and its effect on you.

4. **C**ommit to emotional forgiveness. Commit to a public or private gesture of forgiveness. You might share with someone your decision to forgive, or you can write a forgiveness letter that you never send. What will you do?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Adapted from: *Five Steps to Forgiveness: The Art and Science of Forgiving* (2001), by Everett Worthington, Ph.D.