

## Forgiveness using the REACH model

Holding onto old hurts or wounds does not lead us toward healing. It keeps us stuck in the feeling of the hurt, the story of the hurt, the belief about what this hurt means. Forgiveness is not about making the event okay; it is about releasing yourself from the negativity that surrounds the event. You don't have to like what happened to forgive what happened. You do not hurt the person who hurt you by holding onto the feeling; instead, you hurt yourself by not forgiving.

Martin Seligman, Ph.D. discusses the REACH model of Forgiveness in his book, "Authentic Happiness" in his chapter on "Satisfaction about the Past". The REACH model was originally developed by Everett Worthington. It is a five step model for practicing forgiveness. Forgiveness is a choice and using this model can help you learn *how* to forgive.

- R** *Recall* the hurt, in as objective a way as you can. Do not think of the other person as evil. Do not wallow in self-pity. Take deep, slow, and calming breaths as you visualize the event.
- E** *Empathize*. Try to understand from the perpetrator's point of view why this person hurt you. This is not easy but make up a plausible story that the transgressor might tell if challenged to explain. To help you do this, remember the following:
- When others feel their survival is threatened, they will hurt innocents.
  - People who attacks others are themselves usually in a state of fear, worry, and hurt.
  - The situation a person finds himself in, and not his underlying personality, can lead to hurting.
  - People often don't think when they hurt others; they just lash out.
- A** *Altruistic gift*: A stands for giving the altruistic gift of forgiveness, another difficult step. First recall a time you transgressed, felt guilty and were forgiven. This was a gift you were given by another person because you needed it, and you were grateful for this gift. Giving this gift usually makes us feel better. As the saying goes:
- If you want to be happy ...
  - ...for an hour, take a nap.
  - ...for a day, go fishing.
  - ...for a month, get married.
  - ...for a year, get an inheritance.
  - ...for a lifetime, help someone.
- We do not give this gift out of self-interest. Rather, we give it because it is for the trespasser's own good. Tell yourself you can rise above hurt and vengeance. If you give the gift grudgingly, however, it will not set you free
- C** *Commit*: C stands for commit yourself to forgive publicly. In Worthington's groups, his clients write a "certificate of forgiveness," write a letter of forgiveness to the offender, write it in their diary, write a poem or a song, or tell a trusted friend what they have done. These are all contracts of forgiveness that lead to the final step.
- H** *Hold*: H stands for hold onto forgiveness. This is another difficult step, because memories of the event will surely recur. Forgiveness is not erasure; rather, it is a change in the tag lines that a memory carries. It is important to realize that the memories do not mean unforgiveness. Don't dwell vengefully on the memories, and don't wallow in them. Remind yourself that you have forgiven, and read the documents you composed.

Text in the REACH box taken from [Authentic Happiness](#) by Martin E. P. Seligman, Ph.D. Original model of REACH is from [Five Steps to Forgiveness](#) by Everett Worthington.

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