

READER'S GUIDE

FORGIVING OTHERS, FORGIVING OURSELVES

BY

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CONFLICT RESOLUTION
MONTH IN COLORADO

Listen. Talk. Work it Out.

Each year, Conflict Resolution Month in Colorado selects a book as recommended reading for the community at large, with the goals of spreading information and encouraging conversation on ways to resolve conflicts at all levels of society. This year's selection deals with forgiveness, an aspect of conflict resolution that is frequently ignored because it takes place not in the public eye, but privately, through processes that vary in method and timeframe by individuals, communities, and cultures. After a conflict without mutual resolution occurs, we can choose to carry our anger at another person around with us, or we can engage in the process of forgiveness.

What is (and isn't) forgiveness? Does forgiveness mean condoning actions that have brought harm, or grudgingly accepting harmful actions in an effort to "forgive and forget"? No, these perspectives represent just two ways the sometimes complex process of forgiveness may be misunderstood. "Forgiveness involves three dimensions: forgiving others, being forgiven by others, and forgiving yourself. While these may seem like three different actions, we see no distinction with regard to the definition of forgiveness," write Isenhardt and Spangle in *Forgiving Others, Forgiving Ourselves*.

THE GUIDING QUESTION

How does a better understanding of forgiveness play a role in allowing individuals, families, workplaces, and communities to move beyond conflict to a place of stronger relationships and better understandings of one another?

INDIVIDUALS

Forgiveness, of others or of yourself, represents one of the few truly effective ways to release long-carried painful emotions that may otherwise drag you down and steal joy from your life - when you bury feelings, you bury them alive. What does forgiving others look like to you? What does forgiving yourself look like, and is forgiving yourself more or less difficult than forgiving others? What barriers to forgiveness have you experienced? What are ways that you can incorporate forgiveness into your daily life?

FAMILIES

Family relationships are simultaneously some of the most important and some of the most complicated relationships of all. Offenses hurt more when they come from family, and those wounds can take longer to heal. Growing up in a family that models forgiveness is the most important predictor of adult forgiveness. What are your family's practices on forgiveness? Is forgiveness modeled in your family, and if not, how can you begin this practice?

WORKPLACES

Workplace conflicts take a large toll on productivity; in fact, experts report that more than 40% of management time is spent on addressing unresolved conflicts. While no one expects all coworkers to be best friends, there is a reasonable expectation that all workers possess the skills to move beyond conflicts and maintain productive working relationships. Forgiveness plays a large part in this ability, allowing organizational members to move on. How is forgiveness practiced in your workplace? To what extent is forgiveness valued? Does your workplace have an established conflict resolution procedure, and is it utilized?

COMMUNITIES

The value placed on forgiveness varies by community and culture. The authors write "... just as social norms can encourage us to seek revenge, community values that support conciliatory behaviors promote forgiveness" (41). What are your community's beliefs on revenge and forgiveness? How does your community encourage forgiveness, or if not, what could you as a community member do to change this?

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