

STEP 6

Forgiveness

How does one know if she has forgiven? You tend to feel sorrow over the circumstance instead of rage, you tend to feel sorry for the person rather than angry with him. You tend to have nothing left to say about it all.

Clarissa Pinkola Estes

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SESSION OVERVIEW

You may need 1 to 3 sessions to complete any unfinished business and to complete the exercises:

1. Complete the Forgiveness readiness checklist with the couple
2. Complete the Readiness Steps
3. Complete the personal readiness form – If needed
4. Complete the Forgiveness Letter Exercise
5. Confirm the forgiveness ritual or ceremony

Prepare Enrich Forgiveness

If you have been certified in Prepare Enrich, you could review the couples Prepare Enrich Report at this time on Forgiveness.

Prepare enrich will look at the couples ability to both give and grant forgiveness in their relationship. It does a great job of showing how past hurts, are effecting the current ability to be able to forgive (see the report on the next page.)

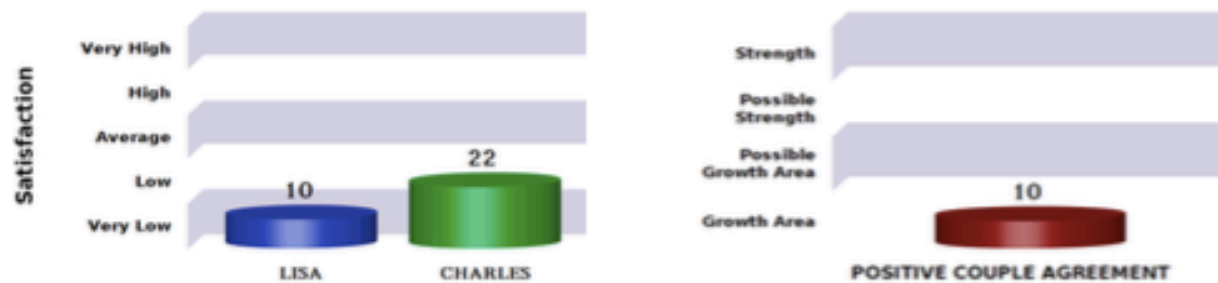
The two recommended exercises are:

- Seeking & Granting Forgiveness
- How to take a time out

Both the exercises are listed in the following pages.

Forgiveness

The **Forgiveness** category measures a couple's perception of their ability to forgive one another following a conflict, betrayal, or hurt. It looks at how well they request and grant forgiveness in their relationship.



LISA has several concerns about their ability to request and grant forgiveness in their relationship.

CHARLES has some concerns about their ability to request and grant forgiveness in their relationship.

Growth Area: The couple disagrees or shares mutual concern about most of the items in this category. Help them discuss 1-2 Agreement Items and 2-3 of the Disagreement, Indecision, or Special Focus items listed below. Forgiveness is a key ingredient for working through issues, hurts and disappointments. Teach this skill along with communication and conflict resolution.

Strongly Disagree 1		Disagree 2	Undecided 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
LISA	CHARLES	Positive Couple Agreement (10%)			
2	1	- My partner has done or said some things I may never be able to forgive.			
		Disagreement (10%)			
3	5	+ I feel closer to my partner after we work through a disappointment.			
		Indecision (0%)			
		Special Focus (80%)			
4	4	- I find it difficult to trust my partner because of his/her past actions.			
5	4	- In our relationship we forgive, but we don't forget.			
2	1	+ My partner does a good job of apologizing and asking for forgiveness.			
5	5	- My partner has a hard time admitting that he/she is at fault.			
5	5	- My partner has a hard time letting go of past hurts and disappointments.			
4	4	- My partner tends to hold a grudge for a long time.			
5	4	- Tension remains in our relationship, even after we work through hurts and disappointments.			
1	1	+ We do a good job of resolving issues and moving forward.			

PREPARE/ENRICH Exercises: *Seeking and Granting Forgiveness, How to Take a Time-Out*

SEEKING AND GRANTING FORGIVENESS

All couples eventually experience times of conflict, hurt, and letting each other down. Sometimes the offense is as minor as forgetting a date or failing to run an errand. For some couples, the offense might involve a major betrayal such as infidelity, addiction, or abuse. Either way, taking time to seek and grant forgiveness can play a powerful role in healing and restoring the relationship.

Forgiveness is the decision or choice to give up the right for vengeance, retribution, and negative thoughts toward an offender in order to be free from anger and resentment. This process promotes healing and restoration of inner peace, and it can allow reconciliation to take place in the relationship.

It is also important to be clear about what forgiveness is not. Forgiveness is not forgetting, condoning, or perpetuating injustice. Since it is sometimes unsafe or impossible, forgiveness does not always involve reconciliation. Forgiveness is not always quick; it is a process that can take time to unfold. Don't rush your partner if they need to spend days or weeks working through the process of granting forgiveness.

Six Steps for Seeking Forgiveness:

1. Admit what you did was wrong or hurtful.
2. Try to understand/empathize with the pain you have caused.
3. Take responsibility for your actions and make restitution if necessary.
4. Assure your partner you will not to do it again.
5. Apologize and ask for forgiveness.
6. Forgive yourself.

Six Steps for Granting Forgiveness:

1. Acknowledge your pain and anger. Allow yourself to feel disrespected.
2. Be specific about your future expectations and limits.
3. Give up your right to "get even," but insist on being treated better in the future.
4. Let go of blame, resentment, and negativity toward your partner.
5. Communicate your act of forgiveness to your partner.
6. Work toward reconciliation (when safe).

Created in part with content contributions made by Richard D. Marks, Ph.D., Marriage for Life, Inc., Jacksonville, FL

HOW TO TAKE A TIME-OUT

Some conflicts become heated as levels of anger and frustration rise. Rather than speaking assertively, partners begin to accuse, criticize, or yell. Rather than listening actively, partners interrupt, belittle, and ignore. Physiologically, the “fight or flight” response is triggered as each person goes into a protection mode with little or no regard for their partner. In this state of escalation, it is not uncommon to say or do things we later regret. Moreover, it is nearly impossible to have a productive conversation leading to a mutually agreed upon resolution. This is when a “time-out” can be beneficial. A time-out provides couples with an opportunity to cool down, identify their feelings and needs, and begin to think productively again about how to approach the issues they face.

1. RECOGNIZE your need for a time-out. Are your fists clenched? Is your face red? Are you breathing fast? Are the tears streaming down your face? Do you feel like screaming or throwing something? Are you afraid of your partner’s intensity? Do you feel emotionally closed off?

- Learn to recognize the signs that things have become too intense for you to have a productive interaction with your partner.
- What physical and emotional reactions indicate you need a time-out?

2. REQUEST THE TIME-OUT. Call a time-out for yourself by saying something like “I’m just too angry to talk right now; I need to take a time-out. Please give me an hour to calm down and gather my thoughts.”

- Remember to call the time-out for yourself. It is seldom helpful to tell the other person “You need a time-out!” Suggest a time when you think you’ll be ready to resume.

3. RELAX AND CALM DOWN. Take some deep breaths. Go for a jog. Take a walk or a bath. Write in your journal. Read, pray, or watch television for a while.

- Do something that will help you relax and recover from the emotional intensity.
- What method(s) could you use to calm down?

4. REMEMBER WHAT’S IMPORTANT.

- Try to identify what you were thinking and feeling that became so difficult to discuss.
- Think about “I” messages you could use to tell your partner what you were thinking or feeling, and what you need from him/her.
- Try to spend some quiet time considering your partner’s point of view and what they are feeling.
- Remember the two of you are a team, and the only way your relationship will “win” is if you work toward a solution that both individuals can feel good about.

5. RESUME THE CONVERSATION. Bring in the skills of Assertiveness and Active Listening and/or the Ten Steps for Conflict Resolution. These structured skills can help contain the intensity as you attempt to resolve a conflict. Honor your commitment to return to the issue when you are ready to have a more productive conversation.

INTRODUCTION

Forgiveness is the last phase in dealing with an affair. Forgiving each other comes after confronting and resolving the painful issues that but avoided earlier. With forgiveness comes closure on the affair story. True forgiveness opens the door to a new and more intimate partnership.

My experience indicates that moving forward through the process of rebuilding is necessary before couples can truly understand the concept of forgiveness. Apologies and forgiveness on the heels of disclosure blocked the possibility for growth, rebuilding, and meaningful forgiveness.

The goal of this step is for the couple to understand what true forgiveness means, and for the couple to devise a celebration or a personal ritual to mark this transition.

Note - even if your couple has decided to end their marriage, it is important

Relationships have many injuries. Both people hold resentment for past actions, some of which they may not even know. The idea is to “flush” old resentment from the relationship for a fresh start!

that they have worked through the process of forgiving.

Coaching note - if your couple has worked through all five steps so far, forgiveness will be a much easier transition. This is why it's important to have them work through the affair story personal healing emotional needs before they come to the stage. If a client has empathy for the other person and both people have been working actively at repairing the relationship trust is already being built. It makes sense to forgive and move on.

If your clients have been lazy and I'm proactive with the process the chances that they are not ready to move on and they are stuck.

This is when you need to look at personal reasons for not being able to forgive plus you will need to go back and revisit the exercises that they did not complete.

Forgiveness List

Misconceptions and bad practices surrounding forgiveness are the biggest mistakes most couples make.

Talk to your clients about what forgiveness means.

1. Forgiveness at this level of betrayal needs to be asked for. To voluntarily offer it without the infidel acknowledging their behavior is inappropriate and counter-productive to the healing process.
2. Forgiveness should not be asked for or granted as a “blanket” experience. There are multiple levels of betrayal that need to be identified and forgiven. Besides, it allows the spouse to process small pieces of the betrayal without having to handle the entire experience all at once.
3. The forgiveness request should not only identify each specific behavior of the infidel, but should also contain a “best guess” identification of how this behavior hurt the spouse.
4. Forgiveness is not the same as a commitment to reconcile the marriage. Forgiveness needs to be initiated, whether or not the marriage is saved.
5. The forgiveness process stimulates the rebuilding of respect, trust and love. It works like this: To the degree an individual can forgive some of the violations that occurred in this betrayal, to that degree they can begin to rebuild respect. To the degree they can rebuild respect, they can rebuild trust. To the degree that they can rebuild trust, they can start to rebuild love (if both spouses desire to do so).
6. The ability to forgive is a learned skill and highly influenced by an individual's history with both being forgiven and forgiving others. If an individual struggles in this area, it often has more to do with their history than with the current infidelity.

The Forgiveness Checklist

Before we proceed further I like to take the client through a checklist to see their success with the programs Steps 1 to 5.

You need to have a copy of the form, and asked the client the questions.

Take note on if both people feel the task has been complete or is only one feels it has been complete.

Make sure you discuss with the client what needs to get done in order to move forward in the forgiveness exercise.

Remember that forgiveness will feel false unless they actually feel ready to forgive.

Tip : The client may have a burning question that they would like to ask about the affair but because they have been so happy with the progress of treatment they have felt like it could be counterproductive to bring it up now.

When I asked the question "are there any loose ends about the affair that need to be discussed before we move on to forgiveness" I make sure that I pause and check the response of the betrayed partner. Their homework will be to make a list of questions about the affair that they would really like answered. It could be a really simple question.

When the client is truly ready to forgive, the typical response to inquiry about the affair is

"we've dealt with that pretty well"

"I think that's finished"

Ready?

So in summary when you believe the spouses are ready to ask for forgiveness, review their progress with them. Encourage each of them to talk about the changes they have made, the problems they have results, and the work they are continuing to do. If the couple runs into any snags in reviewing the issues

and they progress, they are not quite ready for forgiveness. Shift then to the issues that they have been surfaced. When these issues are resolved, again reviewed them with their progress, preparatory to moving to forgiveness.

Sometimes couples decide they are ready before that is the case. Couples who are afraid of the work ahead often claimed they ready for forgiveness long before that is possible.

With others, in the process of reviewing their progress, your gut may say they are not ready. Trust your gut.

Help them understand why you believe they are not ready and what they need to work on to be ready.

Forgiveness is too important to allow a cheap imitation.

FORGIVENESS CHECKLIST A

Ready to forgive check list	Outcome/Check	Note
Completed tasks of rebuilding stage – steps 1 to 5		
The couple has developed a new pattern of open, honest, and complete communication = rebuilding trust		
Obsession – The need to talk about affair constantly should be nearly over or over		
Expectations for the marriage/relationship should be more realistic		
Other marriage secrets have been shared and dealt with		
Both spouses know how the affair related to their families of origin		
They know their own individual danger points – those situations where they are most likely to ignore reality, in hopes of avoiding pain or gaining pleasure.		
Both people know their own emotional needs		
They know their partners emotional needs		
Intimacy now is more exciting & rewarding		
The couple can share their sexual fears and desires more openly		
When set backs occur, they can be dealt in more productive ways		
Are there any loose ends/questions about the “affair” that needs to be discussed or revised BEFORE we move onto forgiveness?		
Ask each client – “Identify how you may sabotage this relationship, without being aware of it” E.g. not sharing feelings; ignoring your own pain and criticism the others behavior		

The Readiness Checklist

Moving on is not a single step but a process or series of steps.

What effects readiness includes:

- factors contributing to the affair
- personal beliefs about forgiveness
- partners behaviours
- consequences of the affair/the fallout about of the affair

Do all of these steps need to be complete before moving to Step 7?

- No. Not all of these will be essential for each couple. Discuss with the couple which steps are essential.

FORGIVENESS READINESS CHECKLIST B

STEP		YES/NO	Comment/Action
1	Recognition – Does the affair partner have a clear understanding of what happened and its consequences		
2	Responsibility -Has the affair partner taken full responsibility for their decision to have an affair. Eg "It is insulting to say "I never meant to hurt you" as it avoids there responsibility of deciding to have an affair		
3	Remorse - Does your partner have deep sadness, morning or even pain from the hurt they have caused you?		
4	Restitution -Does your partner do positive actions to minimize the hurt & negative consequences from the affair?		
5	Reform Your partner provides reassurance & evidence of a commitment not to hurt you in the future by: - Pledging not to hurt you in the same way again - Addressing conditions that contributed to		

	<p>the affair</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discuss how you both will prevent affairs in the future - Being open and transparent in their actions 		
6	<p>Release</p> <p>-Are you ready to let go of the need to punish your partner for the affair, or demanding further restitution.</p> <p>(this is generally 1 yr after the affair discovery)</p>		
7	<p>Reconciliation</p> <p>-Are you ready to commit to rebuilding a relationship based on mutual trust & caring. (This does not necessarily mean reconciling or staying in your marriage)</p>		

COUPLE READINESS EXERCISE

Have the couple make two lists:

1. What steps have you and your partner already accomplished in moving on?
2. What steps still need to take place? (What is holding you back or making decisions difficult? What do you need to do to overcome these barriers? What could your partner do to help?)

PERSONAL READINESS

What if the client is stuck and cannot forgive? It is important to do this quick exercise with the client to separate the affair from personal past injuries.

Use the table and questions below to help the client talk about this problem and what it is doing to the affair recovery process.

The most important take away is ensuring the betrayed spouse makes the decision to move forward – not staying stuck in bitterness.

PERSONAL READINESS EXERCISE

What are your current difficulties in moving on?

1. List the potential risks and benefits of letting go of your hurt or angry feelings. The lists the risks and benefits of not letting go.
2. What strategies will you use if you continue to feel stuck?

Review the following list as honestly as possible. You may wish to write in your journey the reasons why you feel the way you do about each of these points. Most importantly, create an action plan for how you will overcome the challenge.

	Yes/No	Action Plan
Fear of Vulnerability		
Strong Moral Convictions		
Influence from family & friends		
Unable to contain your emotions		
Unable to make sense of the affair		
Continued hurtful actions or inactions of your partner		
Beliefs about forgiveness		
Fear of Being Hurt Again		
Not wanting to give up status as the injured party		
Other		

FORGIVENESS LETTERS

Two letters are written in this step:

- The forgiveness Letter exercise (Both people complete)
- The Letter of Forgiveness (The infidel only) – See attached documents.

The Forgiveness Letter Exercise

The main exercise here is the Forgiveness Letter.

When the couple has completed the items identified on the list and other loose ends are identified in the review then the next step is forgiveness.

Just as the events that led to the Affair were framed as marital problems, the request for forgiveness goes in both directions. It involves each of them owning their own responsibility for having that the marriage deteriorates to the point of crisis.

NOTE: Review and complete the exercise using an issue in your own relationship, so you understand the benefit of this powerful exercise.

When a couple is ready, a discussion of the meaning of forgiveness is useful as a transition into this final phase of work. The idea of forgiving oneself needs to be part of this discussion. Forgiving oneself is part of excepting forgiveness from the other. In order to ask forgiveness, old to accept it, forgiveness of oneself usually needs to come first. Note: for a few people however, forgiving themselves is the last step. In either case, forgiveness is not complete without forgiveness of self.

Structuring the situation can be done by suggesting that they seem ready to forgive each other. A positive response from each means you can move ahead. Invite each of them to formulate out request for forgiveness. They

should be able to do this fairly easily. Usually the unfaithful partner requests forgiveness for the affair and the pain it has caused. The faithful partners request has to do with that person's contributions to setting the stage for the affair - this goes back to the Shared definition of the affair problem once more.

Remember : they need to understand their reciprocal roles in setting the stage for an affair. For example : The faithful wife may put in a request for forgiveness, as she kept herself a secret in the marriage and not shared with her husband who she really wants and what she wanted.

The unfaithful husband may put in a request for forgiveness, because he used the affair to avoid working on the marriage.

At this stage of coaching, you will notice an ease in which they language will flow as well as in the intensity of their feelings.

Do not be surprised if the entire coaching session ends up in tears - including your tears !

The Forgiveness Letter

This letter may at first appear too brief, maybe even cold and clinical. Don't worry, that is exactly the way it should be!

You will use *each of the contribution items* on your contribution list in the first sentence of each three-sentence paragraph. In the second sentence, you will *identify three feeling words* that your spouse experienced as a result of your behavior. In the third sentence, you *will always make this simple request*: "Will you forgive me?"

Using the following illustration as a guide, write your letter below.

Outline:

I was wrong when I (Contribution #1). I know this must have caused you to feel _____
_____, and _____.
Will you forgive me?

Sample (Wife):

I was wrong when I allowed myself to get too caught up in the children's lives and schedule. I know this must have made you feel neglected, unimportant, and only important to us for your paycheck. Will you forgive me?

Sample (Husband):

I was wrong when I worked too much and even brought work home at night. I know this must have made you feel unimportant, rejected, and lonely.
Will you forgive me?

Now go ahead and write your own forgiveness letter in private. There's room for ten items from your contribution list. You may have more, or you may have less. Fill it up as appropriate.

1. I was wrong when I _____.
I know this must have made you feel _____,
_____, and _____.
Will you forgive me?

2. I was wrong when I _____.
I know this must have made you feel _____,
_____, and _____.
Will you forgive me?

3. I was wrong when I _____.
I know this must have made you feel _____,
_____, and _____.
Will you forgive me?

4. I was wrong when I _____.
I know this must have made you feel _____,
_____, and _____.
Will you forgive me?

5. I was wrong when I _____.
I know this must have made you feel _____,
_____, and _____.
Will you forgive me?

6. I was wrong when I _____.
I know this must have made you feel _____,
_____, and _____.
Will you forgive me?

7. I was wrong when I _____.
I know this must have made you feel _____,
_____, and _____.
Will you forgive me?

8. I was wrong when I _____.
I know this must have made you feel _____,
_____, and _____.
Will you forgive me?

9. I was wrong when I _____.
I know this must have made you feel _____,
_____, and _____.
Will you forgive me?

10. I was wrong when I _____.
I know this must have made you feel _____,
_____, and _____.
Will you forgive me?

Reading Instructions

After you both have finished writing and if you are ready to read your letter to your spouse, set aside a minimum of one half-hour with no interruptions to do so. You will also need some downtime after the reading to reflect on what you have both heard and read.

Prior to reading the letters, read through the following instructions together. Discuss and make sure that you agree on them prior to the reading process.

- The infidel reads his/her letter first.
- Sit facing each other, close enough to touch each other.
- Read slowly and read only what is written. Do not ad lib.
- Make eye contact as often as possible, especially at the last phrase of each item when you ask for forgiveness.
- Each of you is free to ask your spouse to reread any item in the letter. (Sometimes it is cleansing just to hear your spouse acknowledge a shortcoming that has hurt you for years.)
- On occasion, a spouse correctly identifies a wrong behavior, but misidentifies the feelings that the behavior generated in their spouse. If that happens, the hearer should say to the one reading the letter, "I want to talk about the feelings." Clarification is good and necessary, but don't let it become a roadblock in the process. Don't let that lack of understanding get in the way of forgiving that behavior if you are able to do so.
- Each of you will have three response choices to every forgiveness question at the end of each item:
 1. "Yes, I will forgive you."
 2. "No, I cannot forgive you."
 3. "Not now; I cannot forgive you now, but I am working on it."
- At the end of the reading, each second and third choice items (i.e., "no" and "not now" responses) should be reread. Sometimes a spouse can forgive a particular item more easily after hearing the entire list read.

When you have finished reading *and received forgiveness*, reach across and hug your spouse while telling them "Thank you for your forgiveness."

Then exchange letters. Having the letter will be a reminder of your spouse's admission of wrong and your need to forgive those as-yet unforgiven actions. Keep in mind that any unforgiven items now become the responsibility of the spouse who at present can't forgive those items. It will be up to that spouse to notify the other when they are able to forgive the action. The confessing spouse does not have to ask again.

RITUALS AND CELEBRATIONS

Rituals are very important part of the forgiveness process. Many couples will already have thought about a ritual or a celebration they will do in order to move forward and process this event in their marriage. However some couples with little history of family celebrations, can benefit from your suggestions or use one of our Ideas such as the "tower of remembrance exercise". Whatever is decided make sure you talk with your couple about the type of celebration they want, it's symbolic meanings, and whether it will be private or shared with others.

Rituals and celebrations tend to symbolize either the ending of this painful period of the relationship, or a new beginning, or both.

Ideas for Ritual and celebrations

1. Tower of remembrance exercise - instructions provided below
2. Symbolic burial - this is a burial of an item symbolizing the Affair. For example, one of my clients whose husband had a ten-year affair, had found many items heating inside her husbands cupboards that came from or belong to the other woman. What was especially hurtful were greeting cards. It was decided that on a specific time on a specific day they would burn all cards and any item that reminded her of the other woman. By doing this symbolic ritual together, gave her new hope for fresh start.
3. A second wedding ceremony or a renewal of the marital vows. Sometimes the children are involved in the celebration, sometimes not. Often the couple chooses to renew their vows in a private ceremony without any witnesses.

Any sort of ritual is fine as long as it holds meaning for the both spouses. The ultimate goal is a shift of focus from forgiveness to celebrating!

Forgiveness gives some closeout to an extremely difficult period, and move the affair from the couple's immediate agenda today Shared history. The affair becomes an event that, like other past Events, can be talked about when it's relevant to do so.

With forgiveness, one phase of the marriage ends and the door opens to another.

Tower of remembrance exercise

The couple writes down the things that they understand have hurt, harmed or injured the other person. The goal is to really understand and connect to the impact this betrayal of trust or violation of connection has caused the relationship. It is also used to process other “betrayals” or “hurts” from time past. You should have a good idea by now, of all the items that need to be forgiven.

The couple is sent to the beach or peaceful location. They gather a rock for each of the requests. Once a rock is collected for each request, the couple stands an arms distance away from each other. The unfaithful partner begins...

"I betrayed a sacred trust by doing_____. The impact of that has been _____. What I did against you matters and it has caused you immense pain and suffering. I recognize that you may not trust me right now, but I choose to repair this broken trust by being transparent, open, honest and have integrity with you from this point forward. Will you forgive me?"

The forgiver has 3 options:

1. They accept the rock and say, **“Yes, I do forgive you”** and place the rock on the ground. This will begin to form and shape the Tower of Remembrance.
2. They can choose to say, **“Not now”**. The rock then goes into their left pocket and the couple must come back to it later.
3. They can say **“No”**, in which case the rock then goes into the right pocket.
4. They continue to go back and forth until they have gone through their list of apologies.
5. Once the tower of remembrance is constructed they must let that resentment and grievance go and never bring it up again.
6. Then, they hold onto the rocks they have in their possession in either the left or right pocket and talk about each of those issues and try to repair them.