

## How you can forgive your ex-husband

Letting go of a spouse's transgressions isn't easy. Here are 5 ways to move on.

By: Deborah Moskovitch



Forgiveness and letting go are topics that often arise in my divorce consulting practice. The individuals who were “wronged” either through betrayal, shattered promises, or a whole host of other reasons want an apology. Many feel that having a sense that justice has been done will ease the emotional trauma. But, the truth is, an apology or restitution is unlikely to happen. Even when apologies happen, offended parties tend to perceive them as less complete and sincere than they ought to be.

I hear:

“He had an affair, he was wrong, and I want him to get down on his knees and beg for forgiveness.” “He promised we would spend the rest of our lives together, and now he’s leaving? I hate him; he deserves nothing!”

And the extreme, “I’m going to cut his !@#\$ off, he doesn’t deserve to be forgiven, only to be in pain for the rest of his life – just like Lorena Bobbitt did to her husband.”

In many instances, the perpetrator of the “sin” is not suffering as much emotional pain as the so-called “victim.” My own journey through divorce as well as the research I’ve done has taught me that people have choices. “Victims” can continue to feel sorry for themselves – even feeling justified

in dwelling on their emotional pain. But that won't help them heal or move on. They are stuck, and suffer many health risks related to their increasingly stressed state. Or, they can choose to make moves that will transform them – by choosing to forgive.

### **Choosing to forgive your ex-husband or ex-wife**

Don't get me wrong. I am not suggesting for one minute that people forget, tolerate, condone, excuse, or become a doormat for their offending former spouse. What I am suggesting is that it is advantageous to let go of the need for revenge and to release the negative thoughts of bitterness and resentment. By letting go, people gain control of their emotions and the control their ex-spouses have over them. Yet, just trying not to be angry rarely works. The pain of the offense can be the pivot point for flourishing. How? The offense gives the "victim" key insights about the perpetrator's humanity and need to be positively transformed. Responsible forgiveness refuses to excuse injustice while opening the door to healing.

A study, authored by Dr. Charlotte vanOyen Witvliet at Hope College in Michigan, found that when people "relived hurtful memories or nursed grudges about how their offenders should suffer, they sweated, their blood pressure surged, heart rate rose, and brow muscles tensed. Thoughts about the human qualities of the offender and forgiveness that set boundaries while finding even a small way to genuinely desire the offender's growth, however, prompted a greater sense of control, calmed emotion, and comparatively lowered stress responses."

Dr. Witvliet explains that once hurt, people often rehearse memories of the painful experience, even unintentionally. And, when people rehearse hurtful memories, they may perpetuate negative emotions and adverse physiological effects. "Victims hold grudges because they may secure tangible or emotional benefits, such as a regained sense of control or a sense of saving face."

### **5 ways to getting over the pain and anger**

Staying positive and self-aware helps people overcome the acrimony and hurt of divorce. Here's how: **Admit it hurts.** Denial gets you nowhere. Keeping a journal about your experience may help relegate the emotional trauma of divorce to part of your past, not your present. Putting your feelings into words, enables you to process your experience psychologically, and can be cathartic. Research indicates that by writing out your thoughts and feelings about your experience including what you've learned from it, can actually help you move on more easily. Consider expanding on this process to include jotting down your ideas

about where you want your life to lead and a plan out how you might get there. Start working on some of these points now to help you achieve your goals.

**Let go of your anger and forgive.** Cut the cord that binds you to the past or you're going to lose your future. This freedom will release you from the control your former partner has over you. But, replace the anger with clear boundaries and clarity about how that person needs to grow, heal, or be transformed. When you can genuinely desire that for the person—even without reconciliation—you are in the process of forgiving.

**Change your thought pattern.** Change your perception of the divorce experience from a crisis to a process to work through.

**Develop feelings of empathy.** Empathy enables you to reduce the negative effects of the hurts and the grudges, and enables a more positive outlook. Empathy can even reduce the physical stress responses in your body.

**Grant forgiveness.** You are not letting your former spouse off the hook, but rather, you are letting go of your negative emotions and freeing yourself from a prison of hurt and vengeful emotion. You can do justice and love mercy at the same time. Forgiveness will reduce your stress levels and result in an improvement to your health.

As they say, happiness is the best revenge. How people cope with the emotional consequences can significantly affect their well-being. Reducing negative emotions will give you a positive outlook, better relationships, an increased enjoyment of life, and greater optimism. The general reduction in stress that will result from controlling negative emotions is probably the best medicine for those faced with divorce.

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