



A photograph of a sunset over the ocean. The sky is filled with large, white, billowing clouds against a backdrop of orange and yellow hues. The ocean in the foreground is dark blue and choppy, with white foam on the waves. The overall mood is contemplative and peaceful.

DON'T BE SO SALTY

Understanding the
power of forgiveness

23 FEB

Have you ever heard a friend, child, or family member reference someone being ‘salty’? If you have, you may understand the phrase but if not, ‘salty’ is a slang term which indicates that someone is irritated, angry, or resentful.

Perhaps you have felt one of these emotions in the past or are currently experiencing them.

This year ACC Wellness challenges you to a different approach: don’t be so salty through understanding the power of forgiveness.

Marianne Williamson, an American author, spiritual leader, and political activist once said, “Forgiveness is not always easy. At times, it feels more painful than the wound we suffered, to forgive the one that inflicted it. And yet, there is no peace without forgiveness.”

Psychologists have defined forgiveness as a conscious, deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment or vengeance toward a person or group who has harmed you.

Dr. Tyler VanderWeele of Harvard T.H. School of Public Health further explains that forgiveness has two sides and is decisional and emotional. Decisional forgiveness is a conscious choice to replace ill will towards another with good will.

This first side of forgiveness is taken a step further with experiencing emotional forgiveness, which is the act of moving away from negative feelings and expressions towards an individual and no longer dwelling on the wrong or wrongs that may have occurred (1).

Studies show that practicing forgiveness has a positive impact on multiple areas of health including social and emotional, physical, and mental health. In fact, research has shown that forgiveness is linked to mental health outcomes such as reduced anxiety, depression and major psychiatric disorders, as well as with fewer physical health symptoms like high blood pressure and lower mortality rates (2).

Forgiveness can lead to healthier relationships and a greater sense of peace. Most notably, forgiveness is expressed towards others, but it is also a grace that can be given to oneself.

Dr. VanderWeele uses the acronym REACH to describe how to practice forgiveness in your own life.

Recall. The first step is to recall the wrongdoing in an objective way. The goal is not to think of the person in a negative light nor to wallow in self-pity, but to come to a clear understanding of the wrong that was done. Visualize the person and situation and all the feelings that come with it. Don't push aside anything, especially if it makes you feel angry or upset.

Empathize. Next, try to understand the other person's point of view regarding why he or she hurt you, but without minimizing or downplaying the wrong that was done. Sometimes the wrongdoing was not personal, but due to something the other person was dealing with. "People who attack others are sometimes themselves in a state of fear, worry, and hurt," says Dr. VanderWeele. "They often don't think when they hurt others, and they just lash out."

Altruistic gift. This step is about addressing your own shortcomings. Recall a time when you treated someone harshly and were forgiven. How did it make you feel? Recognizing this helps you realize that forgiveness is an altruistic gift that you can give to others.

Commit. Commit yourself to forgive. For instance, write about your forgiveness in a journal or a letter that you don't send or tell a friend. "This helps with the decisional side of forgiveness," says Dr. VanderWeele.

Hold. Finally, hold on to your forgiveness. This step is tough because memories of the event will often recur. "Forgiveness is not erasure," says Dr. VanderWeele. "Rather, it's about changing your reaction to those memories."

During this month's theme of Bodies of Salt Water, will you make the conscious decision to choose forgiveness towards others and perhaps yourself?

References:

1. The power of forgiveness. (2021). Harvard Health Publishing. Accessed January 19th, 2023. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/the-power-of-forgiveness#:~:text=Practicing%20forgiveness%20can%20have%20powerful,esteem%3B%20and%20greater%20life%20satisfaction.>
2. Toussaint, L., Worthington, E., Williams, D.R. (2015). Forgiveness and Health: Scientific Evidence and Theories Relating Forgiveness to Better Health. DO - 10.1007/978-94-017-9993-5.

Quiz:

- 1. Is there someone in your life (or yourself) who you have been ‘salty’ towards and is who you think of when you read this month’s health education resource?**
- 2. If someone acts ‘salty’ towards you, what is your initial reaction?**
- 3. What are the two sides of forgiveness?**
- 4. True or false. Forgiveness only provides mental health benefits.**
- 5. Which health benefits do you think you could most profit from about forgiveness?**
- 6. What does the acronym REACH stand for regarding forgiveness?**
- 7. Will you begin to take any steps towards forgiveness after reading this resource? If so, what?**