

This holiday season, give the gift of forgiveness

You may think of forgiveness as a gift that costs you more than you're willing to give. But it's also a gift that uniquely blesses the giver and receiver, said a University of Illinois Extension family life educator.

"Although forgiveness is a non-traditional holiday gift, one that you can't wrap up and put under a tree, it may be appreciated more than any other gift you've ever offered," said Cara Allen.

In making the decision to forgive, you decide not to hold a grudge toward someone who has hurt you. It also means initiating the process of changing your emotions toward the hurtful event by letting go and choosing to remember the hurt in a healthy way. Forgiveness does *not* mean forgetting, condoning, or excusing the wrong, she said.

"Although you may think of forgiveness as something that you do for others, it is actually a very important gift that you give yourself. The process of forgiveness has many benefits for physical and emotional health," Allen noted.

Social scientists have found that choosing to forgive can lead to better brain functioning, reduced risk factors for heart disease and high blood pressure, less depression, repaired social relationships, increased likeableness, and protection from unhealthy relationships, she said.

So how do we forgive, especially when we've been deeply hurt or betrayed? The forgiveness process includes recognizing the negative emotions we are experiencing and deciding to forgive, Allen said.

"This may happen only after we have recognized how much we are harming ourselves in not forgiving. We also may come to realize that we ourselves are not above needing forgiveness," she added.

Forgiveness is a process, and it doesn't happen in an instant, she said. "First, we choose to forgive and let go of the negative thoughts and emotions that we replay, sometimes over and over, about the wrong that has been done to us," she said.

“When negative thoughts come back, you may think ‘I can’t forgive.’ But forgiveness isn’t a feeling. It’s a choice, and you can learn from the experience and find meaning in the process,” Allen noted.

Factors that hinder our ability to forgive include the fear that offering forgiveness will increase the chance of being hurt again; the fear we will appear weak; the fear that justice will not be served or we will lose our victim status; and the fear of letting go of the anger (anger can serve as a protection against further hurt and pain).

“You may also consider it too unfair or excessive to forgive,” she said.

“Forgiveness is seldom an easy process because it means letting go of a debt that we feel is owed us by another. But we were not created to carry the kind of weight that negative emotions bring us. The benefits of letting go and offering forgiveness are gifts worth giving to others and to yourself,” she said.

News Source:

[Cara Allen, 309-837-3939](#)

News Writer:

[Phyllis Picklesimer, 217-244-2827](#)