

# How to FORGIVE

## A PRACTICAL GUIDE



LYNDA BEVAN

# What People Are Saying About *The 10-Step Empowerment Series*

“Through the use of introspective questions, the book invites the reader to take a journey of self-examination in order to accept the loss and to reengage in life.”

—Ian Landry, MA, MSW, Case Manager

“Bevan has real-life experience in the area of loss and “rebuilding” her life and self-esteem in the face of traumatic experiences such as being abandoned by a partner.”

—Margaret M. Mustelier, PsyD

“Nowadays, there are too many books about adult loving relationships, but they usually are generic and abstract descriptions. This book is different because it moves to specificity and provides concrete steps to overcome a disrupting episode in our lives.”

—Carlos J. Sanchez, MA, Family Therapist

“Lynda Bevan delivers what she promises in the title of the book: it is a practical guide and a no-nonsense approach. Her descriptions of the experiences are palpable.”

—Chin Tao, LMFT

“This is a well thought out, useful little book that is an excellent guide for those recovering from a broken long-term relationship.”

—Robert Rich, MSc, PhD, MAPS

“The book is studded with illuminating case studies and provides an excellent exposition of issues such as post-traumatic emotional responses, pre-trauma expectations, setting boundaries, forgiveness and acceptance, and the do's and don'ts of moving forward. A gem.”

—Sam Vaknin, PhD

author *Malignant Self Love: Narcissism Revisited*

“Bevan provides practical steps to help a person begin the process of change, and during that process, to decide how the relationship will be affected, and whether to stay in the relationship, based on how your partner reacts to your new behaviors.”

—Tyler R. Tichelaar, PhD  
Author of *The Marquette Trilogy*

“This easy to relate to, solution-focused guide does not attempt to push an agenda; it simply provides a foundation of understanding along with the tools necessary to begin trusting one's own feelings again. Bevan dedicates great thought toward realistic problem solving approaches while maintaining a focus on safety, health, and growth.”

—Erin M. Huges, LCSW  
*Rebecca's Reads*

“I truly feel that every individual who is dealing with issues of some form of jealousy will greatly benefit from reading *Life Without Jealousy* by Lynda Bevan. This includes people who are not jealous themselves but are being affected by others who are. Learning to understand it, overcome it, and gain effective new ways to communicate will greatly improve the quality of our lives.”

Paige Lovitt  
—*Reader Views*

When I was in college, I outlined all my lectures and readings so I could easily go back and study those points of importance without being bogged down with extraneous detail. That is what this book is - a detailed outline and explanation of how jealousy and envy in a relationship can be recognized and dealt with. It is a step-by-step guide into the psychology behind the emotions and a program to change them.

Enid Grabner,  
—*Rebecca's Reads*

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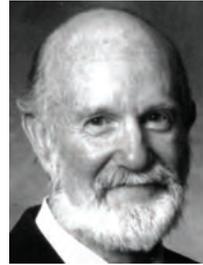
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## About our Series Editor, Robert Rich, PhD

Loving Healing Press is pleased to announce Robert Rich, PhD as Series Editor for the *10-Step Empowerment Series*. This exciting new series conveys practical guides written by seasoned therapists for solving real-life problems.



Robert Rich, MSc, PhD, MAPS, AASH is a highly experienced counseling psychologist.

His website [www.anxietyanddepression-help.com](http://www.anxietyanddepression-help.com) is a storehouse of helpful information for people suffering from anxiety and depression.

Bob is also a multiple award-winning writer of both fiction and non-fiction, and a professional editor. His writing is displayed at [www.bobswriting.com](http://www.bobswriting.com). You are advised not to visit him there unless you have the time to get lost for a while.

Three of his books are tools for psychological self-help: *Anger and Anxiety: Be in charge of your emotions and control phobias*, *Personally Speaking: Single session email therapy*, and *Cancer: A personal challenge*. However, his philosophy and psychological knowledge come through in all his writing, which is perhaps why three of his books have won international awards, and he has won many minor prizes. Dr. Rich currently resides at Wombat Hollow in Australia.



# Contents

<b>Step 1 – Understanding Forgiveness .....</b>	<b>1</b>
To Forgive, What Does it Mean? .....	2
When Malicious Lies are Spread about You.....	4
Emotional Abuse .....	5
Physical Violence .....	6
Embarrassment, Humiliation, & Self-Esteem .....	7
Holding Grudges Against Family .....	8
When a Partner Misuses Your Money .....	10
Holding on to Jealousy Issues .....	10
After Your Partner has Cheated on You .....	11
Envious of a Successful Partner.....	12
<b>Step 2 – Forgive and Forget? .....</b>	<b>15</b>
What does forgiving in a relationship mean?.....	15
<b>Step 3 – What Happens if You Can’t Forget? .....</b>	<b>27</b>
Devise a short-term strategy.....	32
<b>Step 4 – What is Blame? .....</b>	<b>37</b>
How do you rid yourself of an established pattern that is getting difficult to manage?.....	41
Letting go of blame:.....	42
<b>Step 5 – Defusing Conflict and Communication .....</b>	<b>45</b>
Men in Communication and Conflict .....	45
Women in Communication and Conflict.....	48
Forgiveness made easy .....	51
<b>Step 6 –Overcoming Obstacles .....</b>	<b>55</b>
What are obstacles? .....	55
Overcoming Obstacles.....	55
Don’t give in and give up.....	57
Myths.....	58
Conflicting During Communication.....	59

**Step 7 – Designing Your Action Plan..... 65**

**Step 8 – Implementing Change ..... 75**

**Step 9 – Consolidating Your Position ..... 81**

**Step 10 – Your New Patterns of Behavior ..... 87**

    Listening skills ..... 89

    Understanding skills ..... 89

    Empathy skills ..... 90

    Common sense skills..... 90

    Make a Safe Haven..... 91

**Appendix A: Emergency Contacts ..... 93**

**Bibliography ..... 95**

**About the Author ..... 97**

**Index..... 99**

# 1

## **Understanding Forgiveness**

I remember a line in a play I once acted in many years ago, and every now and then it pops into my mind: “To forgive is to overcome, and I have not forgiven you.” I am really confused with this line as it suggests that unless you have overcome the issue and/or the person that you needed to forgive, then you have not forgiven that person. I am sure, like me, if someone has apologized to you for something that they said or did to you, you in return would reply, “Apology accepted, don’t worry, no problem,” and life would carry on regardless. It isn’t that simple though, is it? Life doesn’t just carry on regardless. These deeds, large or small, that have hurt you emotionally are stored in your mind, and when a situation occurs that is similar to past deeds, you begin to have doubts as to whether you have forgiven that person, because you certainly have not forgotten it if it pops up in your mind when a similar situation occurs. This issue begs many questions. One is, “If you haven’t forgotten the deed, does that mean that you haven’t forgiven either?”

This book will identify the many aspects and meanings of the word “forgiveness” and will attempt to enable you to understand exactly how being able to forgive someone is a basic, essential, necessary process in your life. The focus of this book is “forgiveness in adult relationships.” Forgiveness is such an important word, and the action that follows the word is humbling if it is said and done genuinely and sincerely. The person apologizing will feel vulnerable and embarrassed.

*Ask yourself:*

- Have you asked someone/your partner to forgive you?
- Have you really wanted to be forgiven by that person/your partner?
- Have you only asked to be forgiven in order to keep your partner happy so that person believes that he/she is still in control of the relationship?
- Have you found it easy to ask for forgiveness?
- Have you asked for forgiveness so many times that you now feel devalued and lacking self-worth?
- Have you paid the price of repeatedly asking for forgiveness from your partner even when you have done no wrong?
- Have you lost the love you had for your partner through accepting blame and because you have been expected to ask for forgiveness?

I will explore these questions and give some simple explanations in Step 2.

## **To Forgive, What Does it Mean?**

“Forgive” according to *Webster's New World Dictionary*, means: “to give up resentment against or the desire to punish; pardon; to overlook an offense; to cancel a debt.”

If you are unable to forgive, you are unable to “move on” in your life. When you believe that you cannot forgive someone, it will eat you up and destroy the relationship you have with your partner/family member/friend. It will also destroy the relationship you have with yourself. It is not healthy to keep resentment bottled up inside you. Not being able to forgive someone means that you are continually tied to the person you should have forgiven. Many people may require forgiveness by you, and if this is the case then your negative thought process will have totally taken control over

you, and you will be stuck in the negative groove of your own making. When you look at “forgiveness” from this viewpoint you will see that it is essential, for the sake of your mental health, to challenge your current thoughts and work through the process of identifying the cause of your unforgiving attitude. This is to release your negative thought process and replace it with a positive one that will enable you to regain self-control and healthy power now and in future situations. More about how to engage in changing your negative thought processes to positive thought processes is given later on in this book.

“To err is human; to forgive, Divine.”

Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Criticism*

Here are some examples of issues that require forgiveness:

- People spreading malicious lies aimed at casting you in a bad light
- People who have been emotionally abusive toward you
- People who have been physically violent toward you (if this is the case, your life may be in danger—get help.)
- If you have been embarrassed by your partner
- If you have been humiliated by your partner
- If you have caused someone/your partner’s self-esteem to drop significantly
- If you are holding on to a grudge against a past partner
- If you are holding on to a grudge against your parents
- If you are holding a grudge because you have been conned regarding financial issues
- If you are holding on to issues with siblings (rivalry)
- If you are holding on to jealousy issues
- If you cannot forgive your partner for having an affair
- If you are holding a grudge against your step-children (who haven’t accepted you)

- If you believe your partner is more successful than you are and are holding a grudge with your partner because of this
- If you believe your partner is more popular than you are and you continually feel marginalized.

This list is endless and will be different for each of you. Let's take a look at each of the above.

### **When Malicious Lies are Spread about You**

This is a particularly ugly scenario and one that makes you feel that you can't trust anyone. You have to ask, "Why do people talk in this way behind my back?"

*Here are some examples of when this happens...*

- When someone is jealous of you
- When someone doesn't know you and makes wrong assumptions
- When someone wants what you've got
- When someone is unkind
- When someone takes an instant dislike to you
- When someone doesn't know how to approach you and then assumes that you are unapproachable
- When someone believes that you don't like them
- When someone feels intimidated by you
- When someone believes you have ignored them
- When there is a misunderstanding between you
- When there is a quarrel between you.
- When someone believes that you have done something that they disapprove of.
- When you let someone down
- When you are found out
- When someone believes that you have talked about them behind their back

- When you don't take sides and you are "sent to Coventry" (shunned by one or both sides).

Whatever the reason, the outcome is distasteful and, sometimes, difficult to repair. The best way to repair the problem is to face it head on and tackle the person or people who you believe are talking about you. This needn't be done in a confrontational, aggressive way. A cool, calm approach in these circumstances is always the best way.

An example of how to approach this is:

**You say:** "I've heard some terrible things you've said about me, and I find it hard to believe that you would talk about me in this way behind my back. Please tell me what you've heard and give me the opportunity of clarifying the situation for you." If you make the statement or ask the question in this way, you will not aggravate or upset the person and they will react in the same manner.

## **Emotional Abuse**

Someone on the receiving end of emotional abuse often does not know that they are being abused. They become so familiar and accepting of the way they are being treated that they fail to identify that they are being abused. It is hard to understand and accept that you are being emotionally abused, and even more confusing is how you stop it.

*Here are some examples of emotional abuse:*

- You are intimidated by your partner
- You are bullied by your partner
- You are interrogated by your partner
- You are constantly ignored by your partner
- You are verbally threatened by your partner
- You are ridiculed by your partner
- You are undermined by your partner
- You are nagged (persecuted) by your partner
- You are not allowed to make a decision for yourself

- You are controlled by your partner
- You are manipulated by your partner
- You are denied help from your partner
- You feel the necessity to hide things from your partner in fear of their reaction
- You live on a tight budget that is controlled by your partner.

All of the above are forms of emotional abuse. There are more—I am sure you can add to this list. In order to change the way you are treated by your partner, you have to make a conscious decision to make changes in yourself. Small changes in your behavior, reactions and speech will force a change in the way your partner responds to you. It is necessary to make very small changes in your behavior at first and see the difference this makes to your partner's response. You need to forgive your partner first and then begin a process of small changes to shift the power in your relationship with your partner.

## **Physical Violence**

I personally would not continue living with someone who is physically violent toward me. No one deserves to be treated in this way. It is the act of a coward. If you are in this situation, my advice is to get out of the relationship as quickly as possible. I have met people who have forgiven their partner who has been physically violent toward them, but I have yet to meet someone who has managed to curb his/her anger and stop being violent permanently. They might succeed for a while, but eventually the old bad habit returns.

Remember you don't have to put up with this behavior. You always have the option of separating/divorcing. However, John Gottman's research shows there are two types of physical abusers. Type 1 abusers are likely to respond to attempts at separation with murder, so it's not necessarily that simple. The woman needs to plan the separation very

carefully. If you have had violence done to you or received the threat of violence, you are advised to contact your nearest Domestic Violence Support center for advice before acting (see Appendix).

## **Embarrassment, Humiliation, & Self-Esteem**

### **Embarrassed by Your Partner**

It is so cringe-making to be made a fool of by your partner. You feel stupid, and the reaction from people around at that time varies from feeling sorry for you to criticizing you for allowing this to happen. *Why do you allow it to happen?* You allow it to happen because it makes for an easier life in the short term. It is only when you have experienced this type of behavior in a relationship that you can understand the “peace at any price” method. If you react and retaliate to your partner’s remark, World War III will erupt before your very eyes. The “peace at any price method” only comes about by experiencing the verbal onslaught of anger and then seeing the demonic look on the face of your partner when he/she is challenged by you. In order to forgive your partner, it will be necessary for you to believe that your partner knows he/she is wrong by embarrassing you. If you suspect that they are just cajoling you, then rest assured your partner will resort to this type of behavior again in the not too distant future. There are ways around this situation that involve you making small changes in your behavior that will eventually stop your partner embarrassing you.

### **Humiliated by Your Partner**

Humiliation is doled out by your partner so that he/she can be perceived as being better and/or cleverer than you are. Some people use humiliation as a weapon to get their own way. These people ridicule every comment or suggestion you make. The result of this constant criticizing is that your self-esteem will disappear and you will become beholden to your partner to tell you how to think, behave and speak.

Humiliation, ridicule, criticizing, and ignoring result in low self-esteem, low self-worth and no confidence. Forgiving someone who is treating you badly is a huge hurdle to overcome.

### **Causing Your Partner to Lose Self-Esteem**

If you have controlled your partner so much to cause him/her to lose their self-esteem, then you are guilty of behaving in a destructive way to another human being. Taking away someone's self-esteem is also taking away that person's self-respect. No one has a right to do this. A healthy relationship is based on two people having an equal say. If you are the person who is guilty of this behavior, then you need to ask for forgiveness and genuinely mean it. If your partner loves you enough and is prepared to give you a second chance, then consider yourself lucky you have found someone who is prepared to go that extra mile for you in the hope that you will not repeat this behavior.

## **Holding Grudges Against Family**

### **Past Partners**

What can you gain by holding a long-term grudge against an ex? All you are accomplishing is holding yourself back from living a positive, healthy life. Your ex-partner is probably unaware that you are carrying a grudge against them and are having a good time in their new life without you. You, however, are harboring bad thoughts and will become bitter and revengeful. Carrying the burden of a grudge will destroy any new relationship you will have in the future. You will bring excess negative baggage into any new relationship and will probably resort to punishing your new partner for the sins of your ex-partner. Let the grudge go. It isn't worth hanging on to.

Ruminating over unrealistic ideals such as "fairness" or "justice" will get you nowhere. It is doing no harm to your ex-partner and a great load of harm to you and your new

relationship. Women who have been abandoned by men will feel bitter and resentful for a while after a breakup—it is part of the grieving process in any relationship. It would appear that men are able to move on quicker than women. Not being able to let go becomes a problem when someone is stuck in that particular phase of the grieving process. When this happens, it is advisable to seek professional help to forgive your ex and assist you in “moving on.”

### **Step-Children**

When you become involved with someone with children, you will have to accept that the child’s/children’s needs come first. You can never expect a parent (male or female) to put you before their offspring. It takes time for children to accept that their Mom or Dad has someone new in their life, so care and caution are important in order to give the right message to the child/children, which is: “I am not going to take Mommy or Daddy away from you, and I want to involve you in this relationship.”

### **Your Parents**

Some of the people who enter therapy believe that they are the way they are because of something that happened in their childhood. This might indeed be the case. However, if this is the case, once it has been identified and worked through, the person should be able to forgive their parents and let go of the pain and hurt and move on. Stop procrastinating. Become a new you and leave the past behind.

### **Siblings**

Conflict between siblings can be about childhood incidents that the siblings have brought into adulthood. Resentments and hostilities can become especially difficult to overcome if the situation has resulted in the siblings not speaking to each other. Usually, conflict regarding past issues can be overcome by the people involved having calm discussions to clear up any misunderstandings that occurred way back then. Some-

times these issues from the past are best left there with no post mortem to unravel complex emotions that have been either enlarged over the years or dimmed with forgetfulness. A decision to “move on” regardless could be the best option in many cases. Another area of conflict between siblings occurs after the death of one or both parents. “Money is the root of all evil,” and especially so after a bereavement. Squabbles over who gets what are the source of many fall outs between siblings.

### **When a Partner Misuses Your Money**

- Have you been duped?
- Do you feel foolish in believing what your partner tells you?
- Have you forgiven your partner?
- Do you believe that your partner might treat you in this way again?

Ask yourself all these questions and many more before you decide to forgive your partner and stay in the relationship. If your partner has “pulled the wool over your eyes” and manipulated your joint finances, you must be sure that it won’t happen again before you continue in the relationship. It seems obvious to keep an eye on your bank and credit card statement. Another suggestion is to take over the control of the financial budget for a while. Doing this will help you to understand exactly what your partner has done, and you will be able to sleep nights knowing that you are in charge of your joint finances for the time being at least.

### **Holding on to Jealousy Issues**

Jealousy is at the core of resentment, guilt, hostility and revenge. Jealousy is always lurking to bite you on your backside when you least expect it. Jealousy will find a way of messing with your emotions and causing serious relationship mayhem. The best way to tackle jealousy is head on. By that I