

*Those who choose anger and hold their grudges seem bitter and tortured*

# Flex your forgiveness muscle



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With Joanne Wilson

**Y**OU'RE sick of fighting. It's a never-ending merry-go-round of 'he said', 'she said', 'you did this' and 'no, I didn't.' Sound familiar? If it does, it might be time to flex your forgiveness muscle.

Do you ever wonder why some people who, yet having experienced incredible adversity, come out the other end joyful and kind? It seems one key difference in these individuals is forgiveness. Whether they chose to forgive themselves or their perpetrators had a great deal to do with what followed in their lives. Those that choose anger and hold their grudges seem bitter and tortured their whole lives.

The decision not to forgive can be toxic – both to yourself and to your relationship. I am fascinated by the numerous studies that have shown that when we don't forgive and revisit our memories of the supposed wrongdoing, a fear response is produced in our amygdala (the part of our brain responsible for our emotions). This response causes a release of stress hormones which increases our heart rate and blood pressure. If we keep holding on to our betrayals and anger, this response remains active, putting us at risk of developing stress-related illness both mentally and physically.

Forgiving is not easy. Just like any other difficult or new task, you need to learn how to do it with repetition and consistency. For the sake of your own emotional wellbeing, as well as that of your partner – it's worth it.

## Here are my 5 Top Forgiveness

### Muscle Builders:

#### 1. Slow it down

Ask yourself these questions to provide a clearer perspective:



► Forgiving is not an easy thing to do. PHOTO: JORDIDELGADO

'How is he/she feeling right now?', 'Are they justified in their actions?', and 'What is my part in this?' Putting yourself in someone else's shoes is no easy task – especially when it comes to your spouse.

#### 2. Switch off the nasty voice

We all have an inner voice, and sometimes it doesn't play nicely. When we fight, its critical nature comes to the fore, spewing forth things like 'he's trying to manipulate you' or 'she's

twisting your words again' or 'Just ignore him. You'll feel better that way'. All of this is counter-productive to forgiveness. In the heat of emotion, replacing these with kind and respectful self-talk is paramount to moving forward and playing fairly.

#### 3. Let it go

No, I'm not talking about that irritating catchy 'ol Frozen song, I promise! But the sentiment is simple and true. Rather than holding on to all the little things your partner has done (and I know you know what I mean – that vast catalogue of their wrongdoings stored in your brain!), you must learn to leave it behind you. You will have conflict, that is human nature. Don't hold onto the upsets. Work through the current issue and grow together from it.

#### 4. Ditch the baggage

Like it or not, your childhood and parent/carer relationship role models play a big part in the relationship you have with your partner. Perhaps you had a parent who used silence to let you know they were angry. Consequently, each time your partner is quiet, you find yourself wondering, 'What have I done?'. Your partner may just be tired and having a quiet moment. Work out where your fear stems from, put it into context and evaluate your behaviour from this logical, rational standpoint.

#### 5. Who will win?

When you're in the thick of an argument, it's very hard to 'see the forest for the trees'. You lose track of the goal of being on the same side (a tenet of any good partnership) because you're so concerned with winning. But for you to win, your partner needs to lose. Is this the outcome you truly want?

Set the example on the goal of co-operation and commitment to flexing your forgiveness muscle and watch your relationship pump with synergy!

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\*Source: RP data core logic 12 months to February 2017; Sunshine Coast Region.