

How to Forgive Your Ex: 8 Essential Steps

By Eileen Barker

If you want to forgive your ex, here are eight things you should know that will help you get started:

1. Accept where you are right now.

No matter what the circumstances, it is normal to experience loss at the end of a marriage . . . for some, the loss may have been felt long ago, when one of the partners realized the marriage was not others, it occurs later, when the decision to divorce is made.



Either way, if a final decision to divorce has been made, the question is: Now what? Whatever the

circumstances that brought you to this point, whether the divorce was your choice or not, here you are. The best thing you can do is accept the current reality, and the sooner the better. As Bryon Katie says: “If you argue with reality you will lose, but only 100% of the time.”

2. Pay attention to your “story.”

It is normal to create a story about our experiences (it’s what we all do), even though we usually are not aware of it. We tend to think our story is “just the way things are.” Start noticing that you have created a story about your divorce and about your ex. If you are unclear about this, then write down your divorce situation, including your feelings towards your ex, as clearly and completely as you can. Describe the situation as you would to a close friend. When you are finished, step back from what you have written. Start noticing, without judgment, that this is the story you have created about your divorce and about your ex. Part of forgiveness is rewriting the story.

3. Change the Channel.

Have you cast yourself in the role of victim? Do you blame your ex for how you feel? A key to forgiving your ex is to change the story so that you no longer focus on blaming others and seeing yourself as a victim. If your response is “but I AM a victim” then all the more reason.

Identifying yourself as a victim will ultimately cost you your ability to fully and freely move forward in your life. Instead of seeing yourself as a victim, see yourself as someone determined to learn and grow from life’s challenges.

When you catch yourself replaying the old story, “change the channel.”

4. Give yourself permission to feel everything.

Allow yourself to feel all of your feelings, knowing they are all valid and important. Emotions such as anger, fear and sadness have their



time and place, as does grief. Often, we avoid feeling our grief because, let’s face it, it’s painful. Yet, in its purest form, without any story attached to it, grief can be exquisitely beautiful. It attests to the depth of the human heart. So give yourself permission to feel all of it, and appreciate the important healing role that emotions can play.

5. Be selective about who you turn to for support and advice.

Good support is invaluable during a major transition such as divorce and in doing forgiveness work. Yet, I am often appalled by the terrible advice given by well-meaning friends and family members. Some of it reflects sheer ignorance of the law, or is the remnant of that person’s own bad divorce experience. Much of it harkens back to the old model of divorce in which battle lines were drawn, and sides chosen. Whatever the source, bad advice can unwittingly cause things to get

unnecessarily adversarial and make it harder to forgive. So be selective about your circle of support. Ask yourself these questions:

- ▶ Does this person support you in achieving the type of divorce you want? If you want to have an amicable divorce, having people take sides or put down your ex is not helpful.
- ▶ Does this person understand the value forgiveness and support you in forgiving your ex? Is this someone who will help you let go of your “victim story” and create a new story?
- ▶ Is this person a good listener? Can this person listen to you without interrupting, rushing in with advice or telling you about his own divorce?

Sometimes you need to educate loved ones on how they can best support you. It’s perfectly ok to kindly explain what you need and want!

6. Honor the Gifts from the Marriage

One of the best ways to forgive is to honor the past, including everything that has occurred up until now. This of course includes your marriage. If you make it wrong, and if you make your ex wrong, on some level you are implicitly also making yourself wrong. Instead, focus on the fact that you came to the marriage with love (or the hope of love), and so did your partner. You each did the best you could. Think about any parts of the marriage that you enjoyed, perhaps early on in the relationship, and anything you admire or did admire about your ex. Focus on any gifts of the relationship such as children or special experiences, or anything else that was positive for you.



7. Forgive yourself.

Self-forgiveness is ultimately the most important aspect of forgiveness and for many people this is the hardest. Long after your anger at your spouse has subsided, many people are left with self-judgments that are extremely harsh: “How could I have been so stupid?” “See, you messed things up again.” Whether, you have judged yourself, blamed yourself, thought yourself a failure, or acted in ways you regret, remember that you too did the best you could. Finding compassion and love for yourself will go a long way toward forgiving your ex, and enable you to start creating a positive future.



8. Trust your own timing.

The timing of forgiveness is a very individual thing. Some people are ready sooner, and others later. If do not feel ready to forgive, or feel any resistance to the idea of forgiveness, then the best thing is to stop and look into the resistance, honoring the message it holds for you. Trying to push past it is counter-productive. Above all, honor yourself and your timing.

No matter what has occurred, it is possible to forgive! And remember, you are not doing this for your ex, you are doing it for yourself. In the end, forgiveness is the greatest gift you can give *yourself*.



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