

CAN YOU FORGIVE AND FORGET?



As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, **I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison.**

Nelson Mandela

Forgiveness is not a trait that comes naturally to us, but consider the personal cost when we don't forgive; spend our lives avoiding the transgressor or worse are consumed with a desire for revenge? Research suggests forgiveness is linked to increased satisfaction with life, more positive emotions, less negative emotions and fewer symptoms of physical illness. On the other hand when we find it hard to forgive it creates spikes in cortisol (stress hormone), and this can throw off our immune system. When you hold a grudge you increase the flight/fight response and an elevation in heart rate. And over time that's not a good thing for our overall health and well-being.

Often we link what has happened to us as unfair, making it difficult for us to forgive. Interestingly though research suggests areas in the brain associated with forgiveness are often deep in the emotional centres, rather than in areas of the cortex, which is usually associated with reasoned judgment. Fairness on the other hand is not associated with the emotional centre which means fairness and forgiveness can sometime clash. So dwelling on the justice of a situation can create a roadblock to forgiveness.

Of course it's not easy to forgive and certainly forgiveness takes time. But next time you feel hard done by, or are having relationship difficulties, be there work or personal, consider the following:

Forgiveness is not about forgetting or condoning the action.

Forgiveness is not necessarily about reconciling with the transgressor.

Forgiveness is about changing your attitude towards the original hurt, so that it no longer wounds you.

So we can dig our heels in and remain victims, or free ourselves of the shackles of hurt, resentment and anger and not waste time on those who would do us harm.

AUTHOR NOTE: There are some transgressions that are so serious and not easily forgivable, and may require counselling or therapy.

