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Innovative Counseling

Forgiveness

by Jayne Morgan-Kidd

When working through emotionally upsetting experiences, often the last piece to fall into place is that of forgiveness. We can clear our anger, sadness and fear reactions and still not have completely cleared our connection to memories because of a lack of forgiveness.

Sometimes people will resist forgiving someone for what they feel is a very good reason. It's often something like this: "If I forgive him, I'll let him treat me that way again." Or "If I forgive him, that means it was okay that he hurt me." These reasons will block progress in treatment until they are explored and understood.

For some people, the word itself (forgiveness) is the obstacle. If forgiveness means that it is "okay" that you were harmed or belittled or neglected, then you will not be able to let that go completely. If that is your definition of "forgiveness", let's change to a word or a phrase that makes more sense to you. You might feel better about "releasing your emotional

attachment to the event" or "releasing that person from your heart".

Often religious teachings encourage forgiveness. I've met with many people who tell me they have forgiven others for their mistreatment and injustice because they know they are supposed to do that. Yet when we begin exploring more deeply, it becomes apparent that they still have strong feelings about the pain experienced in those relationships. There has been no true forgiveness. You cannot forgive someone simply because you are supposed to do so. It is not a decision you make with your mind. It is a release of your emotional attachment to an experience of pain.

In my work as a therapist, I have come to believe that the best and least painful way to release emotional attachment to upsetting memories is to connect to the memory, allow yourself to feel the negative emotion while simultaneously being stimulated by something that works with your energy system and/or nervous system. In my work, I use EFT and EMDR for this purpose. I have found that both of these types of treatments are very effective for releasing emotional attachment to negative experience and bringing about more complete healing, including forgiveness.