



## A STUDY ON FORGIVENESS AND BENEFITS OF FORGIVENESS THERAPY TECHNIQUES

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### ABSTRACT

*Positive psychology frequently views forgiveness as a character trait and a virtue that anyone seeking a greater sense of well-being should strive to cultivate. Forgiveness is crucial for the emotional health of people who have suffered abuse. Instead of keeping them emotionally invested in injustice or trauma, it moves individuals along. This study focuses on Forgiveness as a process, decision-based forgiveness, cognitive forgiveness, emotional forgiveness, the psychology of forgiveness, and the benefits of forgiveness. This paper describes the advantages of practicing forgiveness, forgiveness therapy, Four Steps to Forgiveness (A powerful way to change life for the better), and techniques to help the clients (Enright model Intervention, REACH model, Forgiveness letter).*

**KEYWORDS:** *Decision-based forgiveness, cognitive forgiveness, emotional forgiveness, Enright model intervention, REACH model, Forgiveness letter, empathy, acceptance.*

### INTRODUCTION

Forgiveness is one of the traits explored by positive psychology that might help us lead more fulfilling lives (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). According to some philosophers, Forgiveness requires "an attitude of sincere benevolence towards the offender as a person" (Holmgren, 1993, p.34; see also Downie, 1965). The strongest position of forgiveness as a concept in positive psychology comes from this aspect of benevolence that is good.

Resentment or rage is let go of through forgiveness. No, reconciliation does not imply forgiveness. You are under no obligation to continue a damaging relationship or put up with an offender's behaviour. There are, however, circumstances in which a specific person might be better off not forgiving. When sexual assault survivor gives themselves permission to not forgive, they may feel more powerful. The act of forgiving someone, including oneself, is sometimes described as an individual, deliberate psychological process of letting go of resentment, bitterness, anger, and the need for vengeance and retribution. According to the evolutionary theory, our ability for forgiveness evolved in the same manner as our propensity for vengeance during natural selection.

Forgiveness and retaliation are social tendencies that helped early humans solve conflicts. We have optimism that we can change these capacities even if both of these components of our nature are unchangeable, making the world a more forgiving and less vindictive place (McCullough, 2008). Being unlike your opponent is the finest way to get revenge. (Aurelius Marcus). Changes in cognition, action on the part of the victim or offender, a conscious choice, an emotional or

expressive experience, a spiritual experience, or any combination of factors might lead to forgiveness. Forgiveness can be thought of as a personality attribute or as a component of a more complex enduring quality like resilience. Some people are more forgiving than others. There are several definitions of forgiveness that highlight various features of it and represent many of the theories and methods of comprehending it that are now in use.

It is simple to feel animosity and want to exact retribution after being badly injured or deceived by a close friend or relative. To feel kindness toward the offender and to sincerely forgive is considerably more difficult, though. According to Martin Seligman, this is why people are unable to forgive:

They believe it is wrong to forgive since it involves showing compassion to the offender but not to the victim and because it prevents retaliation, a strong emotion that many people hold onto. Enhancing optimal human functioning is becoming just as significant in psychology as preventing distress, as more practitioners build thorough protocols for forgiving therapies and research their effectiveness. In addition to researching the negative effects of anger and animosity, researchers are also focusing on the advantages of practicing forgiveness.

Because they are the only fields that specifically try to assist forgiveness, applied research like positive psychology is a major source of evidence regarding the effects of forgiveness on well-being. Research on forgiveness is also led by positive psychology, and it is becoming increasingly popular to emphasize the role that forgiveness plays in preserving and enhancing well-being. Focus on the advantages of forgiving others and developing a more forgiving personality has been a



continuous theme in positive psychology. Forgiveness is viewed by some as an example of good clinical psychology (Worthington, Griffin, Lavelock, 2016).

### THE OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- To study decision-based forgiveness, cognitive forgiveness, and Emotional forgiveness.
- To study the psychology of forgiveness and the Advantages of practicing forgiveness.
- Describe forgiveness therapy and the benefits of forgiveness.
- To provide the techniques to help the clients.

### FORGIVENESS AS A PROCESS

Finally, according to Enright and Fitzgibbons (2015), in order to truly forgive, all three parts of forgiveness—cognitive, affective, and behavioral—need to alter. They contend that in order to be likely to be responsive to forgiveness, a person needs to have some degree of emotional preparation. The process of forgiving can take many different forms and includes things like developing empathy and acceptance, changing one's perspective, and looking for benefits.

For instance, a person might choose to use one or more of these techniques to retell the incident in a journal, which would help them release their anger and facilitate emotional recovery (McCullough, Root, & Cohen, 2006). Since certain research suggests that some instances of forgiveness may require sorrow, a person's capacity for acceptance is crucial to how successfully the process of forgiving others will go (McCullough, 2008).

Regardless of the intervention model, or theory, the approaches were based on, Wade, Worthington, and Meyer's (2005) meta-analysis found three components that were present in all successful forgiveness interventions: committing to forgiveness, using a variety of techniques to lessen resentment, and combating resentment with empathy or positive other-oriented emotions. Last but not least, Webb and colleagues described the act of forgiving as a coping strategy that incorporates mindfulness and entails reframing and negating negative emotions (Webb, Phillips, Bumgarner, & Conway-Williams, 2013).

### DECISION-BASED FORGIVENESS

DiBlasio (1998) places special emphasis on the use of willpower in making decisions and in forgiving others: The cognitive letting go of resentment, bitterness, and the craving for retribution is what is meant by decision-based forgiveness. It does not always signal the end of emotional suffering, though. Here, forgiving someone is seen as a deliberate act, as a decision to let go or to cling on. People are capable of separating their hurt sentiments from their ideas of anger and bitterness. DiBalsio's decision-based paradigm focuses on cognitively letting go of bitterness and resentment but ignores painful sentiments that frequently linger after the decision was made.

### Cognitive Forgiveness

The perspective that views transgressions as violations of cognitive structures, such as beliefs, is the foundation of another cognitive definition of forgiveness (Gordon et al., 2005). A cognitive approach to forgiveness uses psychodynamic therapy and traditional cognitive therapy methods to assist individuals in changing their cognitions. The cognitive model developed by Thompson, Snyder, Hoffman, and Rasmussen et al. is one such illustration (2005). They suggested the following as a definition of forgiveness: "Framing a perceived violation in a way that changes one's reactions from negative to neutral or positive to the transgressor, the transgression, and its consequences. Oneself, another person or persons, or an event that one considers being beyond the control of anyone, such as disease, fate, or a natural disaster, maybe the source of the transgression and, as a result, the object of forgiveness.

### Emotional Forgiveness

True forgiveness, according to Worthington (2006), only takes place when emotional forgiveness is possible since emotional replacement is required. When emotional forgiveness is finished, the person will have swapped out the unforgiving emotions of resentment, rage, and vengeance with the forgiving emotions of empathy, compassion, sympathy, and selfless love. They contend that changes in emotions, rather than changes in thoughts, motivations, or conduct, while all will frequently happen as well, will more truly reflect the shift in emotional forgiveness as it starts and progresses toward completion.

### The Psychology of Forgiveness

Researchers who study forgiveness emphasize various facets of this intricate psychological concept as they develop their hypotheses. While it is true that forgiveness is a situational response and a skill that can be learned, it is also strongly impacted by a personality feature and is hence referred to as trait forgiveness. Psychology explains why some people are simply more forgiving than others by pointing to individual personality variations and other dispositional traits that have a tendency to persist over time.

### Advantages of practicing forgiveness

It could be challenging to forgive someone, particularly if they apologize poorly or not at all. It is frequently the best course of action, though. According to psychologist Robert Enright, a well-known model of forgiveness specifies four steps. Understanding how you have handled or repressed your anger will help you identify it in the beginning. The next step is to decide to pardon. Start by admitting that trying to ignore or deal with the offense hasn't worked and that you might need to forgive in order to go on.

Third, learn to have compassion for the perpetrator in order to nurture forgiveness. Consider if the behavior was the result of the offender's circumstances or intentional intent. Lastly, let go of your negative emotions and reflect on how the experience and forgiving yourself may have aided in your personal development.



### To Overcome Resentment

Even when we think we've "gone on" or "forgotten about it," resentment can occasionally persist for years. In order to let go of resentment, consider possible motives for the offender's actions, allow yourself to feel the hurt, and then make an effort to forgive them. Forgiveness can give rise to a sense of strength that overcomes resentment. There are numerous instances of people who have pardoned someone who has committed heinous crimes against them, such as shooting them or killing their child. No crime is too terrible to be pardoned if it results in peace or healing in the end.

### Forgive Past Transgressions

Start by taking ownership of your deeds and owning up to your errors. Think about the circumstances around the offense and make a decision on how to stop it from happening again. Then, forgive yourself by focusing on the idea, saying it out, or writing it down. You should apologize to the person you injured and try to improve their situation.

A common association between mistakes and ingrained self-perceptions is that "I always say the wrong things" or "I'll never be able to pay my bills" are two examples. Before engaging in self-forgiveness, it could be necessary to acknowledge and address these thoughts. Because of this trap and others, self-forgiveness is extremely challenging.

### Forgive Yourself

What occurs when we do the crime ourselves? It's one thing to forgive someone else, but what about ourselves? Accepting responsibility for mistakes is important, but having intense guilt and shame has negative long-term effects. Self-forgiveness is a challenging but incredibly rewarding journey. This approach necessitates acknowledging errors, understanding how they occurred, and helping to remedy them.

### DISCUSSIONS

In order to overcome unhealthful rage, patients in forgiveness therapy are asked to face injustice and emotional suffering before working toward forgiveness. Depression may be treated with this therapy in addition to medication or cognitive behavioral therapy. There is a growing understanding that forgiving someone just entails lessening your rage against the event or the person who injured you. Because forgiveness entails a focus on goodness toward the offender, it is impossible for forgiveness and anger management to be the same thing. It might be harmful to equate forgiving others with controlling one's wrath, releasing anger or resentment; Letting go of bitterness and ideas of retaliation; An intentional and purposeful choice to vent thoughts of wrath or revenge toward someone who committed an injustice; letting go of unpleasant emotions like resentment; transcending negative emotions by becoming above them; letting go of negative emotions like wrath; replacing them with more enjoyable pursuits will help you get over your resentment. The emotional and cognitive process of forgiveness is defined by the release of anger, which has been shown to have long-term detrimental effects on one's physical, emotional, and cognitive health.

### FINDINGS

Worthington and Scherer (2004) claim that stress is a result of unforgiveness when it is viewed as a detrimental emotional and cognitive construct. This suggests that forgiving can be utilized as an emotion-focused coping mechanism, which may improve general health. The inability to forgive was associated with hatred and rage, both of which have been shown to have harmful impacts on health, particularly cardiovascular issues. On the other hand, forgiveness was connected to good feelings of compassion and empathy (Worthington & Scherer, 2004). A growing number of theorists, therapists, and medical experts have hypothesized that how people react to interpersonal crimes might have a substantial impact on their health (McCullough, Sandage, & Worthington). They discovered that those who forgive others have higher life satisfaction and lower rates of depression. Last but not least, this research has revealed that more forgiving people are more likely to participate in introspective thinking and less likely to engage in any kind of ruminating, such as: ruminative depression, which is a type of repetitive thought that depressed people experience, brooding, a type of critical thinking about oneself or others, and reflective rumination and analysis of the causes of one's feelings are other types of ruminative depression. According to research conducted by experts at Hope College, reliving painful experiences and harboring anger have a severe impact on the emotional well-being and physical health of individuals who choose to keep a grudge (Witvliet, Ludwig, & Vander Laan, 2001). Other research therein demonstrated that unforgiving reactions of rage, blame, and animosity contributed to bad health, particularly coronary heart disease. When asked to envision not forgiving an offender, study participants experienced more negative emotions, such as wrath and despair, were more aroused, and felt less in control. The sympathetic nervous system was activated, blood pressure spiked, and the heart rate increased.

### BENEFITS OF FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness and forgiveness treatment have been linked to greater feelings of joy, hope, and optimism. Furthermore, the ability to forgive people may assist shield against serious conditions including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety. It was also proven that the activity benefited heart patients by significantly lowering their blood pressure. Every time the subject of one's anger or resentment enters the mind, the body releases stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline. The persistent release of those hormones can lead to tension, and anxiety as well as a reduction in creativity and problem-solving abilities. Many beneficial psychological changes can result from forgiveness, including the reduction of toxic rage, the restoration of potentially beneficial relationships, personal development, and the exercising of good regardless of the reaction. Modelling forgiveness for others may result in intergenerational and even societal improvement in addition to personal advantages. lessening unpleasant feelings and depressive symptoms

- Restoration of optimistic perception
- Relationship restoration
- Decrease in anxiousness
- Stronger spirituality
- Increased self-esteem
- A higher feeling of optimism,
- Improved conflict resolution skills
- Improved stress management
- Coping mechanisms.

Figure 1 represents the benefits of forgiveness.

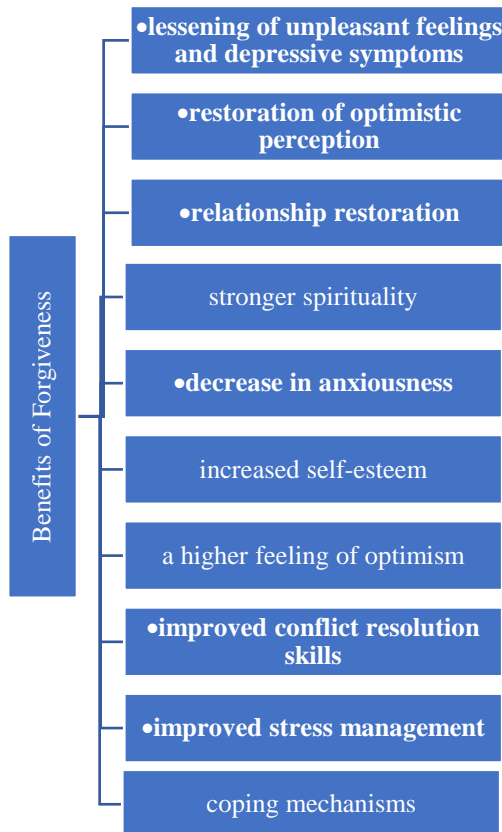


Figure-1

### FORGIVENESS AS A MORAL VIRTUE

The general consensus is that forgiveness emphasizes letting go of enduring and intense anger. This has resentment and vengefulness as synonyms. Readers who are not well-versed in the idea of forgiveness may take this statement at face value. But if forgiveness is a moral virtue, like justice, patience, and kindness, for instance, this intended and generally agreed-upon description cannot possibly be accurate. Given that it has the particular characteristic of goodwill toward others in common with the other moral virtues, forgiveness does appear to be a moral virtue. To forgive entails being kind to people who have wronged you (see, for example, Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2015). Love for the person who wronged you is the purest manifestation of this virtue (Enright, 2012). To be a good forgiver, one need not attain this level of forgiveness. Lewis Smedes (1984) pointed out that we are all flawed pardoners.

### SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE

All significant life occurrences, including marriage, successful and unsuccessful relationships, accidents, and serious illnesses, are mostly brought on by one's destiny. The anguish and suffering that must be endured as a result of

destiny are so frequently manifested through such events. The people who affect us the most negatively or positively in life are frequently doing so to make up for mistakes made in prior lives. Our mind is referred to as the home of our emotions and feelings. It consists of both the conscious and subconscious minds. Even though it is relatively small in comparison, our conscious mind is the portion of the mind that we are aware of. On the other hand, we know very little about and have limited knowledge of the subconscious mind, despite the fact that it is the one that greatly affects the conscious mind. It is made up of millions of impressions that characterize our personality traits, as well as our strengths and weaknesses. The give-and-take account centre is a delicate centre in our subconscious minds that houses all impressions of predetermined events. Despite our intelligence, the give-and-take account centre compels us to behave.

### FORGIVENESS THERAPY

Therapy that specializes in helping patients forgive and move on is known as forgiveness therapy. There are numerous varieties of forgiveness therapy, some of which we shall discuss here, but they can be divided into two groups: process-based therapies and decision-based interventions



(Akhtar & Barlow, 2018). The key differences between the two camps are that process-based forgiveness programs involve cognitive, behavioural, and affective tactics across a longer time frame. Decision-based forgiveness therapies, in comparison, are considerably more condensed (often only one session), focus mostly on cognitive techniques, and require a commitment to carry out the process of forgiving outside of the session. When someone has been harmed, the process of forgiving involves letting go of anger and showing compassion to the offender. Giving a formal pardon, forgetting the offense, or mending a friendship are not all examples of what forgiveness entails. You can forgive someone even if you don't think their acts were right or reasonable.

#### FOUR STEPS TO FORGIVENESS

A powerful way to change life for the better

- ❖ Step 1: List the people and things you need to forgive.
- ❖ Step 2: List all of the things that are making you unhappy right now about the circumstance. It's great if they are your genuine emotions rather than the wonderful things you "should" feel. Since that is where you are, you must move past how you actually

feel. You can only advance from where you are; you cannot advance from where you would like to be.

- ❖ Step 3: Compile a list of the advantages of forgiving this circumstance. These are frequently the reverse of how you are experiencing right now. Sadness will transform into happiness, rage into calm, heaviness into a sense of lightness, and so forth. If you are unsure about the advantages, pick a few basic positive emotions that you would like to experience to get started (for example, "peace," "freedom," "more at ease," "more confident," etc.). If you visualize how much better you would feel after forgiving someone, it could be easier for you to recognize the advantages.
- ❖ Step 4: Affirm your forgiveness. Write a forgiveness affirmation that includes a handful of the advantages you listed in Step 3 that currently appeal to you the most. This is just a simple declaration of whom you want to forgive, followed by an acknowledgment of the advantages of doing so. Next repeat this line slowly, at least three times, while remaining silent in your thoughts. After that, you go back to Step 1 and repeat the process. Once you start to feel relieved, keep moving around. Figure 2 illustrates the steps to forgiveness.

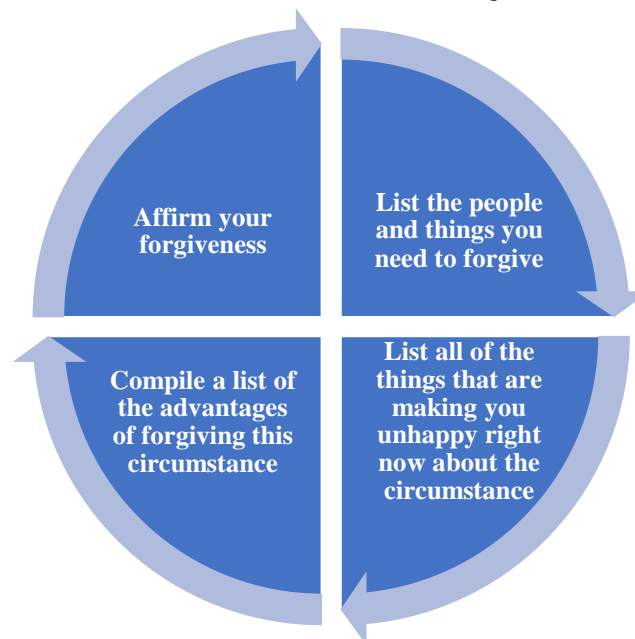


Figure-2

## FORGIVENESS THERAPY: 3 TECHNIQUES TO HELP CLIENTS

### ✓ Enright Model intervention

- The popular Enright Model is a process-based intervention (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). This structured intervention consists of four phases and 20 modules. The client is assisted in understanding the psychological defenses play within them, recognizing and acknowledging the anger they feel, and assessing the psychological injury brought on by the offense in the first step, referred to as uncovering. The idea of forgiveness as a reaction is explored in the second phase, decision-making, and then a commitment to forgive is made. The client is assisted in growing empathy for the offender and accepting the suffering endured during the third phase, cognitive reframing of the offense. Clients are assisted in finding purpose in their suffering in the third phase, deepening. 2018 (Akhtar & Barlow).

### ✓ REACH Model

The REACH Model is a kind of decision-making forgiveness intervention (Worthington, 2001). The

intervention's five steps of forgiveness are denoted by the acronym REACH.

Participants start by recalling (R) the pain. They also grow to feel sympathy (E) for the wrongdoer. Third, participants reinterpret pardon as a benevolent gift (A) for the criminal.

where they commit to doing so in the fourth. They learn to hold onto their forgiveness in the last phase (Akhtar & Barlow, 2018).

### ✓ Forgiveness letter

Another illustration of a McCullough and Worthington-created decision-based forgiveness intervention (1995). The client agrees to forgive during a single session, making this a quick forgiveness intervention. Then the client apologizes in writing to the offender. The client begins the process of forgiving themselves after this intervention, which is noticeably shorter than the others and forces them to finish the job on their own. Figure 3 shows the techniques to help the client.

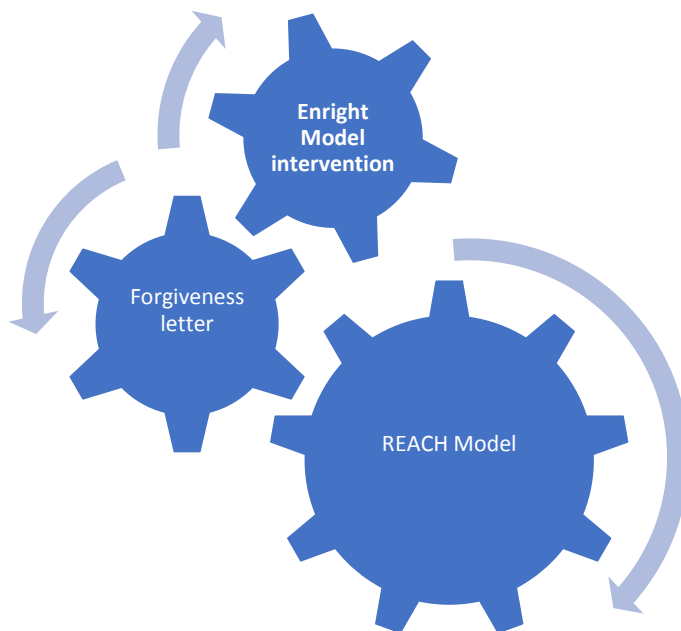


Figure-3

## CONCLUSION

There is evidence that forgiveness has positive effects on people's well-being in a number of areas, including Life satisfaction, mental health, and physical health are related to each other (Harris & Thoresen, 2005; Worthington & Scherer, 2004). It has been demonstrated that forgiveness improves mood, increases optimism, and protects against resentment,

tension, anxiety, and melancholy. Therapy for forgiveness can be highly helpful for clients who, despite having every right to do so, are nevertheless holding on to negative feelings following mistreatment. Forgiveness has been linked to a range of beneficial effects, including declines in melancholy, resentment, and ruminating. Figure 4 represents the positive effects of forgiveness.

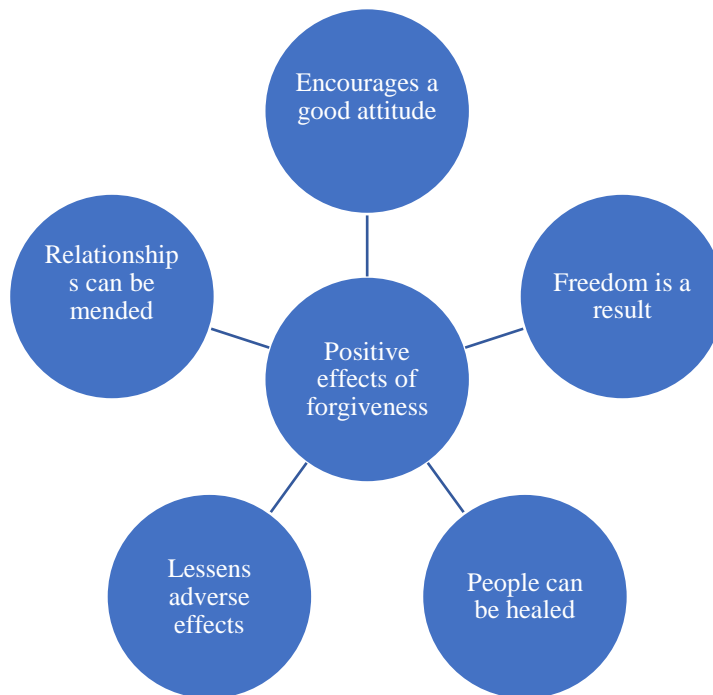


Figure-4

#### 1. Forgiveness lessens adverse effects

It's awful to keep a grudge. Recent meta-analyses on the benefits of forgiveness therapy found that forgiving reduced negative affective characteristics such as melancholy, hostility, wrath, stress, and discomfort (Akhtar & Barlow, 2018).

#### 2. Forgiveness encourages a good attitude

Beyond just making us feel better, forgiveness has many other benefits. Additionally, it can raise our overall sense of contentment, fulfillment, and compassion (Akhtar & Barlow, 2018).

According to research, persons who have been mistreated benefit from forgiveness training by feeling more hopeful and having higher self-esteem. We increasingly find forgiving activities where even young children can learn forgiveness, such as those taken from Sonja Lyubormirsky's book *The How of Happiness: A Scientific Approach to Getting the Life You Want* (2007).

#### 3. Freedom is a result of forgiveness

People who are unable or unwilling to forgive are frequently mired in a whirlwind of unfavorable feelings, and in the most extreme cases, they might spend the rest of their lives seeking revenge. Freedom from a never-ending drive for vengeance can be found in forgiveness.

#### 4. People can be healed by forgiveness

It is not always necessary to inform someone you have forgiven them. In this approach, forgiveness can serve only the damaged party's needs for recovery and empowerment.

#### 5. Relationships can be mended by forgiveness

There are situations when a significant or irreplaceable loved one is the offender. If the wronged party wants to keep their connection intact, forgiving them may be the way to do it.

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