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Forgiveness – Your Health Depends on It

I 'borrowed' this week's ReFresh title from a [John Hopkins Medicine article](#), along with some points to follow.

Unresolved conflict can go deep, and may affect your physical health. Chronic anger keeps you in a constant fight or flight mode, where those stress chemicals wreak havoc on your cardio system, immunity, diabetes risk, and mental health. People who hang on to grudges are more likely to experience severe depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as other health conditions.

Studies have found that the act of forgiveness can be significantly positive for your health. Forgiveness can:

- lower your risk of heart attack;
- improve cholesterol levels and sleep;
- reduce pain, blood pressure, and levels of anxiety, depression, and stress.

Why Forgive?

According to this [Psychology Today article](#), here are five reasons why it is important to forgive:

When you forgive someone, you forgive yourself

The feelings of hurt and anger you feel about someone who has harmed you are often also rooted in what you have allowed to happen to you. Thus, the act of forgiving yourself can allow the resentment and hurt you are feeling to be replaced by healing.

Forgiving gets you out of victim mode

Forgiveness breaks the bonds that tie you negatively to another person. That does not mean you have to pretend everything is back to normal. Instead, you get to choose how you want to move forward with the

individual and/or the relationship. You don't make excuses for the behaviour. You just accept it and make peace: that's very different.

Forgiveness frees you

It allows you to reallocate the energy and emotion you had invested in a negative person/situation to someone/something that is positive for your growth and health.

Forgiveness helps your health

As mentioned, negative emotions rob your energy and impact your body, mind, and spirit.

Forgiving helps move you forward on your spiritual path

Forgiveness encourages compassion. You are able to relate to others as part of the human experience.

Check out the September 16 ReFresh on [Spirituality in the Workplace](#).

Why it is so hard to forgive?

[Check out this article.](#)

What happens if I am Struggling to Forgive?

As you let go of grudges, you'll no longer define your life by how you've been hurt. You might even find compassion and understanding.

There are many articles offering tips about forgiveness. I found [this one](#) to be insightful and helpful, particularly when you are finding it hard to forgive. Some tips from this article include:

Get mad, feel hurt, and grieve.

Feeling grief and anger are natural and healthy responses when someone hurts you. And there's no set time for how long it takes to work through and process the hurt.

Ask yourself whether your anger is constructive or destructive.

Constructive anger solves a problem in the moment so that you respond appropriately to a threat. Destructive anger is repetitive and has no positive result. This type of anger will create brain pathways that make the anger more likely, and it becomes a habit.

Set boundaries.

When you've been hurt by someone you have a relationship with, some gentle boundary setting may be in order. Do not call people out, or blame them. Simply say, "What you just did is not OK."

Recognize that you're telling a story that can be changed.

Our brains are designed to keep us safe from danger. The stories we tell ourselves are not accurate. But the story we keep telling ourselves keeps the threat alive. The quickest way to forgive is to change the story.

What if the person I'm forgiving doesn't change?

Getting another person to change his or her actions, behaviour, or words isn't the point of forgiveness. Think of forgiveness more about how it can change your life — by bringing you peace, happiness, and emotional and spiritual healing.

If you are really struggling from the hurt and anger others have caused you, and you are not able to forgive and/or move on, you may want to seek out a counsellor or coach who can help you get unstuck and move forward.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Morandini', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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If you would like to contribute or have ideas about what you would like to see in the ReFresh series, we would love to hear from you: contact rochelle@bcpvpa.bc.ca.