



HOW DO YOU FORGIVE YOURSELF?

BY GABRIELLE TURNER

How often do we tell ourselves: "I can never forgive myself for that"; those small slip-ups (that most of us inadvertently fall prey to) that build up in your mind to such a degree that you are convinced you are a terrible person (or find other such labels) and can't forgive yourself?

When you start to feel an overwhelming sense of guilt and shame, feelings so awful that you feel your friends would soon drop you if they only knew the truth, then it's time to do something about it.

Those feelings of guilt sap our energy levels and leave us feeling bad about ourselves while not doing anything constructive to resolve the situation we are feeling guilty about.

THERE TEND TO BE FOUR TYPES OF SITUATION THAT WE FIND IT DIFFICULT TO FORGIVE OURSELVES FOR:

- ▶ Hurting someone else.
- ▶ Hurting ourselves with unhealthy decisions e.g. smoking.
- ▶ Not succeeding at a major life task e.g. a failed marriage.
- ▶ Not doing something we feel we should have done.

For centuries the world's religious, spiritual and moral traditions have recommended the use of forgiveness to overcome hurt, anger and guilt. It is only recently however that any scientific research has confirmed the benefits of forgiveness while also recognising that it is much harder to forgive ourselves than others.

Psychologist Dr Frederic Luskin, Director of the Stanford University Forgiveness Project, has been conducting research and workshops on forgiveness for the past 12 years.

The biggest obstacle he has found to self-forgiveness is the tendency we have to wallow

in our own guilt. This is not just about the fact that we feel bad because we've done wrong, but we sometimes try to ward off the consequences of our actions by drawing a blanket of guilt and shame over our heads.

Dr Luskin has said this can become a crazy form of penance. Instead of taking responsibility for what we've done by trying to repair the damage or make things right, many of us decide to punish ourselves by feeling miserable for much of our lives.

Further studies about forgiveness have led scientists to believe that people who have difficulty forgiving are more likely to experience heart attacks, high blood pressure, depression and other illnesses.

The mind affects the body in many ways, and carrying long-term guilt and blame is very stressful. These stressful guilty feelings cause the release of chemicals which can increase your blood pressure, disrupt digestion, tense muscles, increase cholesterol and reduce your ability to think straight.

SO HOW CAN WE FORGIVE OURSELVES AND MOVE ON IN A MORE POSITIVE AND RESPONSIBLE WAY?

We can...

- ▶ Recognise any unrealistic expectations of ourselves. We are all human and all of us make mistakes.
- ▶ Reduce our levels of stress. Using relaxation techniques such as meditation, self-hypnosis or yoga.
- ▶ Be active and do some good rather than feeling bad. Don't waste your energy on feelings of guilt and shame; make the most of your energy for positive action.
- ▶ Categorise your mistake and understand specifically what you feel you have done wrong. This helps you to know what you need to do in order to repair any damage and what actions or words not to repeat. You are

not forgiving yourself for being human and making a mistake. You are forgiving yourself for a specific mistake.

- ▶ Share your mistake with a friend and get support and advice about how you feel.
- ▶ Understand what you want, whether that is to reconcile with the person you hurt or make good your mistake in some way, or to just release the blame and feel calm.
- ▶ A sincere apology to those we've hurt is sometimes all it takes when we can't forgive ourselves.
- ▶ If an apology is not appropriate or possible, then finding other ways of showing the person we've hurt some kindness can help us too.
- ▶ Remember to put things in perspective, thinking of all the good, kind things you've done today.

REMEMBER THAT FORGIVING YOURSELF MEANS:

- ▶ That you realise you might have done something differently if you had known how.
- ▶ That you have not forgotten what you've said or done.
- ▶ That you are still responsible for your actions and words.
- ▶ That you have learnt from your mistake and will act differently in the future.
- ▶ That you accept yourself as you were at the time you made the mistake.

SO HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU'VE FORGIVEN YOURSELF?

- ▶ It's as simple as feeling no more pain or anger when you think of the memory. A transformation of some sort such as making amends or never repeating the action or words will reinforce this feeling.
- ▶ It means having moved on with your life, accepting that you are human and moving forward with a clearer, more positive mind



Gabrielle Turner is a hypnotherapist who specialises in guiding people to resolve difficult feelings such as guilt, anger, fear, low self-esteem and anxiety. She is dedicated to helping people find inner resources that they often don't realise they have, enabling them to make long-term positive changes in their lives. She also helps people to change habits such as smoking, to lose weight, to sleep better and to improve study skills – to name just a few. She can be contacted through Six Senses Spa at the Sharq Hotel or her website www.oasishypnosis.com