

TRUST VS. FORGIVENESS

Whenever you experience some breakdown of trust, no matter how small, it is necessary to practice two relationship skills in order to heal and strengthen your relationship. These are forgiveness, and the rebuilding of trust. Although both have some overlap, there are distinct differences and both are essential for a full reconciliation.

1. FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness means to release or let go of something that betrayed your trust, or hurt and angered you, and was perceived by you as a wrong. Forgiveness assumes that whatever was said or done is in the past. So, when you forgive, you let go of your emotions, your right to hurt back, your resentment, and you extend a pardon for what was done.

2. REBUILDING TRUST

However, rebuilding your trust is focused on a different timeframe. It is considering the present on into the future and believing that your partner will not repeat what was done in the past. It is certainly possible to forgive a past event while not rebuilding any trust in your partner for the future. However, the healing of your relationship will need you to work through both.

Forgiveness and rebuilding trust have three similar steps. We will describe the steps for forgiveness, and then apply them to rebuilding your trust.

1. DECISION

The first step is to actually decide to forgive. This is not an automatic response, but rather one that is deliberate and intentional. And sometimes, before this decision can even be made, you may have to work through strong emotions and better understand some of the facts of what was done.

2. JOURNEY

The decision to forgive launches you on a journey of forgiving. In many ways, this means that you will go through the act of forgiving multiple times... and often, the more hurtful the offense that you are forgiving, the longer the journey.

3. DESTINATION

The journey must lead somewhere. Eventually, every person who truly forgives another must reach a point when they conclude, "It is finished—I will let this go and refuse to bring it up anymore. Even though I may remember it, I now choose to forget."

SKILL SHEET #4 CONTINUED

In many ways, these three steps are taken by the one forgiving. Your partner can help you in supportive ways, but only you can make the decision, walk the journey and reach the destination. However, rebuilding your trust or belief in your partner is much more of a couple activity. The steps may be similar, but the journey often requires your partner changing some behavior, and even making some revisions to the rules of your relationship. These changes must be designed to increase trustworthiness and feelings of security in your relationship. For instance, if one partner acquired a lot of debt without the agreement or awareness of their spouse, then you can imagine that rebuilding a trust would require greater transparency and some changes in how they manage their finances and budget.

And as you work through this rebuilding of trust, the one whose trust was broken will need to reconstruct what they think of the spouse who broke the trust. Remember what we learned about how you have a mental trust-picture of your spouse... how you move some characteristics of your spouse to the foreground, and other things to the background... and so when you rebuild your trust...your belief in your spouse, you must rearrange what you think of your partner to highlight their most positive qualities.

This work of forgiving and rebuilding trust is hard, but it is so worth the time, emotional investment and relationship accountability.