



Tips for Working with an Uncooperative Co-Parent! Why Forgiveness is Key

Ron Cox

Assistant Professor

Hurt, anger, and guilt can bind two people together as tightly as love does. Bitterness against your co-parent creates a prison and a prisoner. Ironically, though, the bitter person who won't let go of their hurt and anger is actually the prisoner. The only real solution, as crazy as it may seem, is to forgive the other. The pain from past offenses is real, and the anger may be justified. However, true happiness is never reached when the burden of anger, hurt, and guilt are carried around and the conflict places children in the middle of a war they did nothing to start. Forgiveness doesn't mend a broken relationship or repair the emotional damage done. Forgiveness simply writes it off as if it were a bad debt that will never be repaid. The following are a few tips on forgiveness:

1. Forgiveness is a choice, a decision we make with the intellect. We don't forgive because it has stopped hurting. The letting go of the emotional pain and hurt follows the decision to forgive, and not the other way around.
2. Pick one small offense and forgive that first. Often it helps to not tackle the mountain of hurt we have endured all at the same time.
3. Communicating to the other that you have forgiven them is optional and, in fact, may be detrimental if the other person does not feel like they have been offensive.
4. Don't confuse forgiveness with accountability. It is possible to forgive someone and still hold them accountable for their actions (not for revenge or personal gain). For example, a spouse who drove while intoxicated with the children in the car can be forgiven. However, the children may not be allowed to ride unaccompanied with him or her until they have demonstrated more responsible behavior.
5. Forgiveness only requires one person; it takes two to build trust and reconciliation. Mercy can be extended to someone even when they don't deserve it. However, forgiveness does not require the person to become vulnerable to more abuse. If an employee is caught stealing from their employer, they can be forgiven without being given their job back.
6. Forgiveness empowers the forgiver. Holding onto pain and hurt makes us into a victim. Victims constantly blame others for their circumstances. Forgiveness is the first step toward overcoming your circumstances by choosing to accept your ability to respond differently.

Conclusion

Just like writing off a bad debt that will never be repaid,

Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Fact Sheets
are also available on our website at:
<http://osufacts.okstate.edu>

forgiveness allows you to move on to bigger and better things. The more time you spend trying to collect on the bad debt, or punish the person who didn't pay, the less time you have to re-build your life and future. Working with a co-parent is difficult. It may take a lot of practice and trial and error to find a way to work together. However, the investment of time and energy is worth it. Learning to work with a co-parent can literally be the difference between the success and failure for the children involved. If you need more help learning how to work with a difficult co-parent contact your local Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Office. They will be glad to offer you additional information.

Sources

- Ahrons, C. & R. Rodgers (1987). *Divorced families: A multidisciplinary developmental view*. NY: Norton.
- Ahrons, C. R., & Rodgers, R. H. (1987). *Divorced families: A multidisciplinary developmental view*. NY: Norton.
- Bray, J., & Kelly, J. (1998). *Stepfamilies: Love, marriage, and parenting in the first decade*. NY: Broadway Books.
- Deal, R. L. (2002). *The smart stepfamily*. Bloomington, MN: Bethany House.
- Hetherington, E. M., Cox, M., & Cox, R. (1985). Long-term effects of divorce and remarriage on the adjustment of children. *Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry*, 24, 518-530.
- Hetherington, E. M., Kelly, J. (2002). *For better or for worse: Divorce reconsidered*. NY: Norton.
- Ihinger-Tallman, M., & Pasley, K. (1997). Stepfamilies in 1984 and today: A scholarly perspective. *Marriage & Family Review*, 26, 19-40.
- Lutz, P. (1983). The stepfamily: An adolescent perspective. *Family Relations*, 32(3), 367-375.
- Mills, D.M. (1984). A model for stepfamily development. *Family Relations*, 33(3), 365-372.
- Papernow, P. (1993). *Becoming a stepfamily: Patterns of development in remarried families*. NY: Gardner Press.
- Speer, R. B. & Trees, A. R. (2007). The push and pull of stepfamily life: The contribution of stepchildren's autonomy and connection-seeking behaviors to role development in stepfamilies. *Communication Studies*, 58:4, 377 — 394.
- Visher, E., & R. Visher (1982). *How to win as a stepfamily*. NY: Brunner/Mazel.
- Visher, E., & R. Visher (1989). Parenting coalitions after remarriage: Dynamics and therapeutic guidelines. *Family Relations*, 38(1), 65-70.

The Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

Bringing the University to You!

The Cooperative Extension Service is the largest, most successful informal educational organization in the world. It is a nationwide system funded and guided by a partnership of federal, state, and local governments that delivers information to help people help themselves through the land-grant university system.

Extension carries out programs in the broad categories of agriculture, natural resources and environment; family and consumer sciences; 4-H and other youth; and community resource development. Extension staff members live and work among the people they serve to help stimulate and educate Americans to plan ahead and cope with their problems.

Some characteristics of the Cooperative Extension system are:

- The federal, state, and local governments cooperatively share in its financial support and program direction.
- It is administered by the land-grant university as designated by the state legislature through an Extension director.
- Extension programs are nonpolitical, objective, and research-based information.
- It provides practical, problem-oriented education for people of all ages. It is designated to take the knowledge of the university to those persons who do not or cannot participate in the formal classroom instruction of the university.
- It utilizes research from university, government, and other sources to help people make their own decisions.
- More than a million volunteers help multiply the impact of the Extension professional staff.
- It dispenses no funds to the public.
- It is not a regulatory agency, but it does inform people of regulations and of their options in meeting them.
- Local programs are developed and carried out in full recognition of national problems and goals.
- The Extension staff educates people through personal contacts, meetings, demonstrations, and the mass media.
- Extension has the built-in flexibility to adjust its programs and subject matter to meet new needs. Activities shift from year to year as citizen groups and Extension workers close to the problems advise changes.

Oklahoma State University, in compliance with Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Executive Order 11246 as amended, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and other federal laws and regulations, does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, age, religion, disability, or status as a veteran in any of its policies, practices, or procedures. This includes but is not limited to admissions, employment, financial aid, and educational services.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Director of Cooperative Extension Service, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma. This publication is printed and issued by Oklahoma State University as authorized by the Vice President, Dean, and Director of the Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and has been prepared and distributed at a cost of 20 cents per copy. Revised 0913 GH