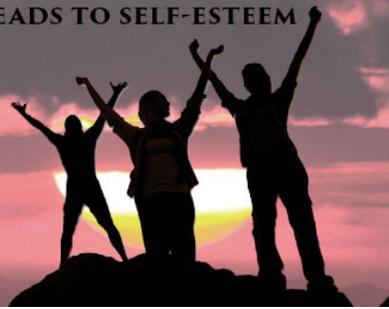


FEELING GOOD ABOUT YOU

THE JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY
THAT LEADS TO SELF-ESTEEM



Module 4 - Worksheet 7

Forgiveness

When you were a child you might have been in situations where you heard mom, dad, a sibling, teacher, or some other significant older person blame you for something. You may have heard statements that began with "It's all your fault that this happened," or "It's just because you...," or "We wouldn't be in this situation if you hadn't...."

Since you were a powerless child who believed the older people in your life, you probably internalized this blame and believed because you'd broken a rule you had done something wrong. Now as an adult, you can reflect on situations such as these, and the feelings you had of blaming yourself, and forgive yourself.

The process of forgiving yourself begins with recognizing that you were powerless. Small children believe that what adults say is the truth. When they blamed you they put responsibility on you regardless of where the true fault lay. For example, a five-year-old named Tom was playing in the kitchen with his three-year-old sister, Lisa. Their mother accidentally spilled hot water on Lisa. As her daughter screamed, mom yelled at Tom saying "It's all your fault she got hurt. Haven't I told you not to play in the kitchen!" This causes Tom believes he must be responsible for his little sister getting burned, and in years to come, he has trouble forgiving himself whenever he sees the scars on her neck.

As an adult, Tom can reflect on the situation and look at the reality of the message that he received from his mother. Was he actually to blame in this situation, or was his mother simply lashing out as a reaction to her own fear and guilt?

Children do not deserve blame! Even if they actually do something "wrong," it's part of their learning process, and it usually reflects a lack of supervision and/or judgment on the part of the adult in charge. With this understanding, Tom as an adult can forgive himself for whatever happened in the situation with his sister.

This is the process involved in freeing yourself from guilt and shame, and developing compassion for the child you were.

Holding onto blame is physically and emotionally exhausting, and if held long enough it can severely distort your outlook on life.

Forgiveness is about forgiving others as well as yourself. Quite often when we feel powerless we allow others to do or say things that we later resent. This feeling of resentment can translate itself into blame of others for whatever the situation may be.

In order to forgive yourself or others it's important to first release all resentment, bitterness, and blame.

What we are talking about is responsibility. When we feel powerless or inadequate we often let go of responsibility for what happens in our life, and allow others to make decisions for us. If these decisions don't feel comfortable, we may begin to blame the people who have made them. For example, Jeff is a 43-year-old teacher who lives several hundred miles from his elderly mother. Recently she has been pleading with him to move back home and care for her in her declining years. Jeff chose to be a "good son" by moving home. He wanted to keep his mother happy, and in the process ignored his own need to stay in a job he loved. Soon after the move he began to blame and resent his mother for "ruining his life."

Forgiveness will come for Jeff when he recognized and accepted his own responsibility in this situation. By choosing to give up his personal power and allow himself to be manipulated by his mother, he was responsible for the decision. If he hadn't wanted to move it was his right to stay where he was. If he chose to move because he wanted to help, he needed to accept the responsibility for that choice.

Blame comes when we feel powerless, and forgiveness comes when we take back our personal power and accept responsibility for our part in any situation.

Whether you are a child or an adult, blaming keeps you in a powerless position. Through forgiving yourself or others you regain your personal power and increase your self-esteem.

Exercise: Forgiveness

Take a few minutes to look at the people in your life you need to forgive. It may be another person, or it might be yourself. In the space below write about the forgiveness you'd like to bring into your life:

Situation and person I blame:

How does this blaming serve me?

Ways I can let it go of blame and forgive:

How I will feel once I'm looking forward to the future and am no longer in blaming mode:

Reflections on Forgiveness

- We learn blaming behavior from significant others.
- When we feel powerless we let go of responsibility.
- When we accept no responsibility we lay blame on others.
- Forgiveness comes when we release resentments and accept responsibility