

## Forgiveness Building Resilience

We have written articles in the past on resilience and on forgiveness. This week we are writing about forgiveness in the context of building resilience.

The largest part of our happiness is a direct product of our relationships with those around us; our family, our friends, our peers, colleagues, teachers and employers. We all want to be happy, and as parents particularly, we want our children to be happy. We want them too, to experience safe, meaningful and happy relationships with the people in their everyday lives.

Child and adolescent psychologist Andrew Fuller tells us that forgiveness is an integral part of not only maintaining healthy relationships, but of building and strengthening existing ones and of creating a sense of belonging and community with those around us.

Belonging, says Fuller, is the most powerful antidote we have to suicide, violence and to drug abuse. "The sense that someone would miss us if we didn't come home is a very powerful human need." Our levels of satisfaction and happiness are directly related to the quality of the relationships that we create, he says, and learning how to create positive friendships and relationships and, even more powerfully, how to repair them in troubled times, is a formula for happiness in life and the central principle of cultural change.

It is important for children to understand compassion, loving kindness and forgiveness. Holding on to hurt, anger and resentment is a recipe for anxiety, low self-esteem and depression for children, adolescents and adults alike.

So how do we teach our children to build strong and healthy relationships or connections with friends, family and community through this essential tool, forgiveness?

- Firstly, it is important to say that the earlier forgiveness is taught, the earlier you can prevent your children from taking on the victim role.
- Help your child to look beyond the action that has caused hurt, to consider why the other person may have behaved as they did. Maybe they are hurting, sad, lonely or feeling left out. This type of conversation teaches your child empathy. There are always two sides to every story and it can help your child feel more compassionate and willing to forgive if they consider what the other side of that story might be.
- Teach your child that forgiveness is not necessarily about forgetting or continuing to accept hurtful behaviour from another. It may mean staying away from a hurtful person in order to protect yourself.
- Allow your child to express their feelings about what has happened before asking them to forgive the hurt. Coach them how to explain to the offending party how their behaviour has made them feel as part of accepting an apology. This helps them feel listened to and validated. For example, "Kristy, I am angry that you took my pencils from my desk without asking. Please just ask me before you use them again. I forgive you."
- Sometimes with older children it can be hard to get them to actually speak their hurt and/or their forgiveness. It may be helpful to suggest they write on a

piece of paper, even in letter form directly to the other party if they wish, stating how they feel about what has happened and how they are willing to forgive and move on. They can then tear up or shred the paper having expressed exactly how they feel. This can also be a helpful exercise where an actual conversation is no longer possible, for example, unresolved hurt or conflict with someone who has moved away or even passed away.

- Be the example. Model forgiveness in your own life. Speak it aloud to your children and let them hear you talk about forgiving others.
- It is also important that children understand that to let go may take time. Don't force a child to forgive on the spot. Allow them time to consider their feelings and their responses and teach them that it is ok to feel hurt or angry. But teach them also that holding on to those feelings can be harmful to them.

Relationships that have grown through difficult times where forgiveness and compassion for others is present are more robust and more likely to last. Individuals who forgive and those who experience forgiveness feel increased self-worth and are more likely to like and respect themselves and much less likely to find themselves trapped in abusive relationships. They are also more likely to forgive themselves for their own mistakes, be less afraid of failure and to more successfully manage life's challenges.

There are long lasting benefits of forgiveness including reduced stress, improved physical health and better relationships. Learning the process of clearing past hurts can free your child to live their happiest life.

As always we are happy to be contacted by phone or by email if you have any questions about how we may support you or your children.

References and some further reading

<http://positivetimes.com.au/pathways-to-resilience-by-andrew-fuller-and-andrew-wicking/>

<http://psychcentral.com/blog/archives/2013/02/27/how-to-teach-a-child-forgiveness/>

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