

## Preparing Couples for Forgiveness, When it's Not Easy

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### Hope Intervention 19-6.5 Sharing Psychological Needs *When Distressed* Card Sort Handout for Clinicians

Couples who have experienced significant distress within their romantic relationship are prone to bitterness, resentment, and distrust (Worthington, 2007). Ripley and Worthington (2014) explain that couples typically engage in a negative cycle in which both partner make negative attributions about their partner's behavior, such as "he doesn't care about me" or "he did that on purpose". These negative attributes are often a protective factor for the couple that is experiencing an unmet, vulnerable emotional need such as the needs for safety, security, affection, attention, respect, and love. Partners who are have worked to rebuild bond and hope within their relationship, and are preparing for forgiveness may benefit from exploring what their partner needs during times of distress both caused by the partner and external factors. The counselors will allow the couple to answer the following questions and sort the twenty two values/needs into, "Essential," "Somewhat Important" and "Unimportant" piles. The providers will have the couple share the answers they choose for the questions and why they chose their answer instead of the others. This exercise was created using the Five Love Language principles by Gary Chapman to generate answers that align with one of the five love language to ensure diversity in options (Chapman, 2009). The service provider will help the clients' explore similarities within their answers. Additionally, the counselors will facilitate a discussion between the couple regarding times when they have observed the truth of their partner's responses to the questions. For example, recalling specific times when one partner was crying and they were consoled by their partner hugging them, can help them couple identify effective methods for

comforting one another. Then counselors will then ask the couple compare their responses to the psychological needs when distressed card sort. Each partner will share their top needs, why they chose top needs and, a time when the response to their distress was helpful. The partner listening will be encouraged to consider their partner's needs for future use when their partner is distressed. Similarities will be drawn between the partner's top choices. These interventions are designed to equip the couple with effective response strategies for both when their partner is experiencing distress during the phases of forgiveness and in the presence of external stressors. As with traditional Psychological Needs Sort, this intervention helps develop an understanding of each partner's needs (Ripley & Worthington, 2014).

Virtues: honesty, empathy, perspective taking

#### Handout for the Couple

Today we will be discussing what each of you needs during times when you are feeling distressed. We will discuss both distress from within the relationship, as well as external strategies. This exercise is designed to equip you with strategies that are have a high impact on helping sooth your partner's distress during times of externally prompted stress and in preparation for soothing your partner during difficult conversations in the forgiveness process. It is important to remember that honesty and vulnerability in this exercise with produce the best results both within this session and will help enable your partner to be more effective in their comforting during stressful situations. Please completed the following questionnaire and then sort the twenty-two card items into the three categories, "Essential," "Somewhat necessary," "Unnecessary". After completing these tasks you will be asked to share what you chose for an answer, why, and examples in the past you can recall. Remember to actively listen to your partner as they share what they look for and benefit from most when they are distressed. Couples who have experienced hurt within their relationship often hold resentments over unmet

emotional needs. Learning the strategies that are most effective in consoling your partner will help increase needs met, show your partner you are actively listening, and help you funnel your time and energy into effective strategies for responding to one another. It is important to remember that these questionnaires and tasks are designed to start a conversation about needs and what is helpful and unhelpful. Some answers may change over time, depend on circumstances, or require multiple options. The goal of this exercise is to promote your ability to discuss emotional needs, as well as provide an opportunity to learn about what your partner is looking for during times when they may be unable to express their needs effectively.

## Appendix for Intervention 19-6.5

When I am crying I need my partner to:

Tell me “it’s going to be okay”

Spend time with me

Hug me

Make me food

When I am stressed about conflict at work I need my partner to:

Listen and show me they understand how I feel

Give me advice

Comfort me

Hold me while I talk about it

Distract me by doing something fun together

Let me have time along to think before trying to talk to me about it

When I am upset about something my partner said I need my partner to:

Explain why they said what they said and apologize

Give me time to get over being upset

Just apologize

Hug or kiss me

Other?

When I am upset about something my partner did I need my partner to

Explain why they said what they said and apologize

Give me time to get over being upset

Just apologize

Hug or kiss me

Other?

When I am upset about something a friend said or did to me?

Listen and show me they understand how I feel

Give me advice

Comfort me

Hold me

Distract me by doing something fun together

Let me have time alone to think before trying to talk to me about it

When I am grieving a loss my partner is not close to I need my partner to

Listen to me talk/process with me

Distract me by doing something peaceful together

Comfort me

Hold me/Hug me/Hold my hand

Let me have time alone but check in on me

Ask me what I need

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Most often, when I feel hurt by my partner I need:

1. My partner to approve of me
2. My partner to show they value me through dates
3. To be at peace with my partner
4. My partner to comfort me
5. My partner to buy me gifts
6. My partner to tell me they love me
7. My partner to tell me what they love about me
8. My partner to reassure me about their commitment to me
9. My partner to respect my boundaries
10. My partner to do a romantic gesture
11. My partner to listen to me express my feelings about the issue
12. My partner to take responsibility for their part of the issue
13. My partner to show small signs of affection
14. My partner and I to work towards greater physical intimacy
15. My partner and I to work towards greater emotional intimacy
16. My partner and I to have my partner validate my hurt feelings
17. To problem solve how to address the hurt together
18. To problem solve how to prevent the hurt in the future
19. To spend more time doing things I enjoy with my partner
20. To travel with my partner/go on an adventure
21. To spend quality time with my partner (not talking about the hurt)
22. To have my partner hold me/kiss me/ hug me

## FREE Intervention 21-3.5

### Letter of Apology with Apology Language Quiz

#### Handout for Counselors

Effective apologies are often learned through observing one's partner and noticing what is most helpful for one's partner to hear. However, Ripley and Worthington (2014) describe specific principles that couples should utilize to guide the creation of a good apology to include, "apologizing before one is 'caught,' taking responsibility for one's own contributions to the offense, offering a clear and direct apology, not using the circumstances and situation factors that contributed to the offense as excuses for one's actions (at least until asked for them), using soft tenderness and touch if it can be accepted, and stating that one hopes to be forgiven for one's actions without pressuring the partner" (p. 293). A questionnaire by Gary Chapman (2008) outlines the five Apology Languages that include "expressing regret, accepting responsibility, making restitution, genuinely repenting, and requesting forgiveness". The counselors should ask the couple to complete the twenty question quiz by Gary Chapman and discuss the results within the session. Each partner should be encouraged to share what the experience of completing the quiz was like as well as their results. Counselors should prompt each partner to share if they believe the results are an accurate representation of both how they apologize and how they best receive apologies. The clients will then be asked to consider times when their partner has forgiven them after an apology and explore how they've witnessed the apology languages in their own life. The counselors should inform the couple that each partner's apology language does not demean the importance of the other ways of expressing apologies but does identify the most impactful apology for each partner. The client's should be encouraged to consider their partner's top apology language as well as the other four ways of apologizing as all positive expressions to ask for forgiveness. Counselors should then transition into a description of how

learning to write an apology letter and formulate a good verbal apology will facilitate conflict resolution or connected to one of the couple's specific therapeutic goals. Counselors should then describe the principles that Ripley and Worthington (2014) outlines within the "Letters of Apology" intervention as listed above and assign apology letters as homework for the week. Next session the couple will read their letters to one another and provide their partner a chance to respond. The counselors should facilitate process the experience of writing and reading the apology letters for each partner, as well as provide an opportunity for each partner to process their responses to the letter. Counselors should facilitate soothing exercises as listed above if the intervention does not progress well and should discuss the likelihood that even if the intervention went well, the couple may experience hurt in the future over events that they have forgiven. Using the principle of "holding on to forgiveness" will be helpful during this phase of the intervention (Ripley & Worthington, 2014, p. 298).

### Handout for Couple

Today we will be exploring what makes a good apology and how each partner best receives an apology. These exercises are designed to help facilitate preparation for forgiveness work. Learning how to apologize well and experience the process as a couple is just one step in the process of forgiveness. Gary Chapman (2008) developed a quiz to identify an individual's apology language (found on public domain: <https://bfm.familyfed.org/wp-content/uploads/5-Love-Languages-Quiz.pdf>). You will be asked to complete these 20 questions, score your results and share these results with your partner. We will spend some time discussing what the experience was like to thinking about the answers to these questions and about how consistent you believe the results are to your own understanding. Remember to actively listen to your partners top apology language to learn how they best receive an apology. It is important to note that all five of the apology languages are important principles for effective apologies (Ripley & Worthington,

2014). This quiz is designed to facilitate a discussion on what your partner finds most helpful when they are receiving an apology. Remember to not disregard the other apology languages as the most effective apologies likely include all five languages in some form. We will also ask you to recall a time when your apology language was evident in the past to reflect on practical examples of the principles we are discussing.

Now let's discuss what makes a good apology. Researchers in this field suggest that, "apologizing before one is 'caught,' taking responsibility for one's own contributions to the offense, offering a clear and direct apology, not using the circumstances and situation factors that contributed to the offense as excuses for one's actions (at least until asked for them), using soft tenderness and touch if it can be accepted, and stating that one hopes to be forgiven for one's actions without pressuring the partner" are effective strategies in apologizing (p. 293). Which of these principles stands out to you? Which of these principles is easiest for you and which is the most challenging? Would you like to learn how to formulate an effective apology? This week's homework will be for you both to write an apology letter guided by your knowledge of your partner's apology language and the principles of a good apology listed above. We will ask you to share these letters in session next week and will discuss the experience together.



## FREE Intervention 21.5 Preparing For Forgiveness by Charting past Forgiveness

### Handout for Counselor

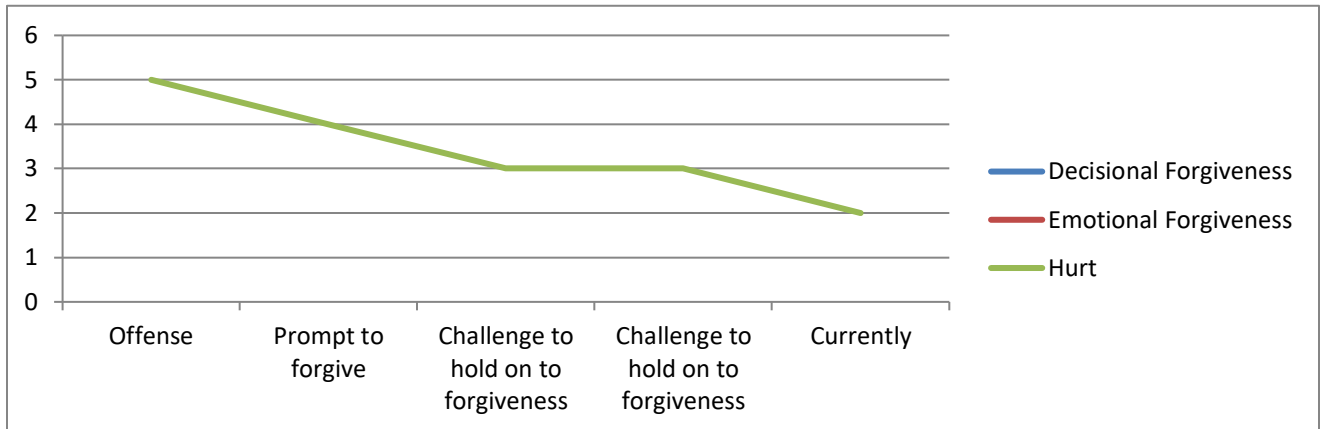
Gordon, Baucom & Snyder (2005), define forgiveness as, “a process whereby partners pursue increased understanding of themselves, each other and their relationship in order to free themselves from being dominated by negative emotion...” (p. 407). In the pursuit of this better understanding of their partner and in an attempt to experientially expose the nature of forgiveness as a process, this intervention will ask couples to recall a time when they have forgiven someone in the past. The offended will be asked to chart their forgiveness of the offended over time, starting with a brief description of the initial offense. The counselor can utilize the empty chair technique or discussing hurts from family of origins interventions to help facilitate the process if clients are not readily able to identify a time when they forgave someone. Both partners should be asked, “What was the offense,” “How did you initially react,” “What promoted your forgiveness,” “What challenged your decisional forgiveness,” “What challenged your emotional forgiveness,” “What helped you hold on to forgiveness,” “Were there times when you wondered if you had actually forgiven the other person,” “Do you still hold resentment against that person,” and “What most enabled you to let go of the injustice”. These questions are designed to help the client consider the specifics regarding the process of forgiveness. The counselor should help each partner identify an individual they forgave and the offense they forgave. The couple should be asked to recall times when forgiveness was easy and why, as well as times when holding on to forgiveness was hard and why. These conversations present opportunities for the counselors to explore with the couple what they might experience in their process of forgiving one another. Counselors should normalize that forgiveness is challenging, requires commitment, does not happen overnight and requires a relationship willing to protect

the decision to forgive. The chart that each partner generates should help them recognize that they may experience similar ebbs and flows in their decisional and emotional forgiveness of one another. The counselors should explain the benefits of recognizing this possibility prior to full forgiveness work and help the couple problem solve ways to respond to the difficult ebbs in forgiveness. The counselors may want to borrow from BOND or HOPE interventions within the Hope Approach to facilitate closeness when the couple is challenged (Ripley & Worthington, 2014). This intervention is designed to help increasing empathy from one partner for another by creating an opportunity to hear about a time when their partner forgave an external offense committed against them and to provide support for the partner sharing about a past hurt (Ripley & Worthington, 2014, p. 289).

### Handout for Couple

Today we are going to discuss the process of forgiveness. What does forgiveness mean to each of you? If you were asked to formulate a cooperative answer in two sentences, how would you define forgiveness in your relationship? Take some time now and discuss. Let's talk about your answers. Share your definitions and describe briefly what you believe are the most important components of forgiveness. Gordon, Baucom & Snyder (2005), define forgiveness as, "a process whereby partners pursue increased understanding of themselves, each other and their relationship in order to free themselves from being dominated by negative emotion..." (p. 407). In the spirit of understanding one another better we are going to ask each of you to recall a time when you forgave someone outside of the relationship. Try to recall the original offense, what prompted your decision to forgive and what challenged you to maintain this forgiveness. We will describe the challenges to holding on to forgiveness as activating events. Use the chart below to graph with approximate time frames the original offense, when you chose to forgive and what prompted forgiveness, and two instances that challenged holding on to forgiveness. Please graph

your decision forgiveness, emotional forgiveness and hurt at each of the events at the bottom of the chart. The ranking for decisional forgiveness, emotional forgiveness, and hurt is 1-6 with six being the most and one being the least of each.



After you are done charting these experiences answer the next few questions briefly and prepare to share in session.

What was the offense? How did you initially react?

What promoted your forgiveness?

What challenged your decisional forgiveness? What challenged your emotional forgiveness?

What helped you hold on to forgiveness?

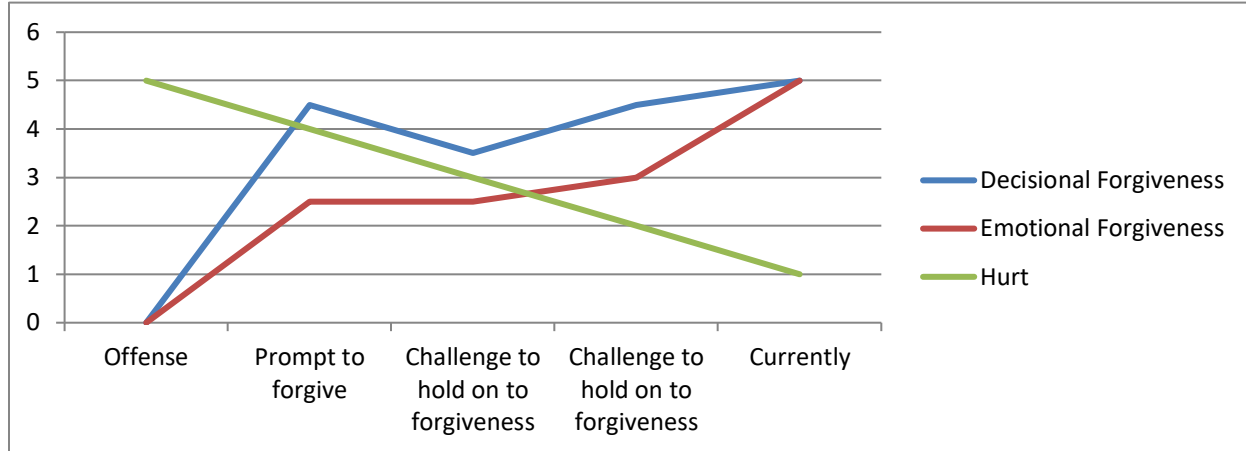
Were there times when you wondered if you had actually forgiven the other person?

Do you still hold resentment against that person?

What most enabled you to let go of the injustice?

Let's discuss these questions. Now let's share about our offense and what it was like to chart the experiences.

Below is a previously generated graph for your reference:



We would expect to see high hurt and low forgiveness at the time of the offense and a switch to lower hurt and higher forgiveness as time progresses as shown above. It is likely that you have varied charts from the contrived chart above as this was derived merely of as an example.

What was it like for you to chart your own forgiveness? Did you learning anything? What did you learn about forgiveness? Can you clearly see the process of forgiveness in your own lives?

What was it like to hear your partner share about their past hurt and forgiveness? Do you have a response you would like to share with your partner? How does your understanding of the process of forgives inform how you will approach forgiveness with your partner? Given that we can clearly see the ebb and flow of forgiveness in your charts, how can we prepare for you to experience difficult ebbs in your efforts to forgive your partner? How can we use what we learned about the best way to respond to our partner's distress to help our partner when they are hurt by the discussion of the offense or use the principles of a good apology to say "I'm sorry"? We hope this exercise was helpful in describing the process of forgiveness and in preparing you to effectively complete the work involved in forgiving and holding on to forgiveness in the future.

## References

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