



Name (optional):

Date:

A different way to think about forgiveness

Forgiveness is a process in which someone who has been wronged chooses to work toward letting go of resentment and anger. If you choose, compassion may become part of that process - but compassion is not required. Forgiveness is not forgetting. It is about reclaiming control over your future. Forgiveness can help you change your relationship with the past, while healthy boundaries help protect your present and future.

You do not need compassion for the person who harmed you. You do need a way to loosen the feelings that keep you tied in knots. This worksheet is a guide for deciding what release, safety, boundaries, advocacy, and healing can look like for you.

What forgiveness can be - and what it is not

FORGIVENESS CAN BE

- Letting go of anger and resentment when they no longer serve you.
- Choosing how much emotional space the injustice gets in your life.
- Compassion, if you decide it is right for you.
- Strong boundaries, distance, or no contact.
- Redirecting anger into advocacy, protection, or meaningful action.

FORGIVENESS IS NOT

- Forgetting what happened.
- Excusing, condoning, or minimizing harmful behavior.
- Automatic reconciliation or restored trust.
- Giving someone access to you again.
- Giving up accountability, safety, or legal options.
- Forcing yourself to feel compassion.

Compassion is a choice

You may forgive and choose compassion. You may forgive and set a firm boundary. You may forgive and use your anger toward advocacy or change. You may use a combination. You may also decide you are not ready to forgive yet.

The four phases

1	2	3	4
UNCOVER	DECIDE	WORK	DEEPEN
What happened?	What do I choose?	Practice the choice	Notice what changed

1 UNCOVERING PHASE

Understand what happened and how it affected you

The uncovering phase helps you name the injustice, understand its impact, and notice which emotions are still active. You do not have to minimize what happened in order to heal.

Describe the injustice you experienced. *What happened? What made it unfair, harmful, or unacceptable?*

How has the injustice affected you?

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Painful emotions (anger, grief, shame, fear) | ☐ Changed behavior or avoidance |
| ☐ Practical or financial costs | ☐ Changed worldview or beliefs |
| ☐ Recurring thoughts about the injustice | ☐ Physical harm or health effects |
| ☐ Changes in trust or relationships | ☐ Need for stronger protection or boundaries |
| ☐ Loss of time or emotional energy | ☐ Something else |

Describe the impact in your own words.

What feelings seem to keep you connected to the injustice today?

Which feelings are still protecting or informing you, and which may now be keeping you stuck?

2 DECISION PHASE Choose what forgiveness will - and will not - mean for you

Many people struggle with forgiveness because their anger is valid. If you are not ready to let go of anger yet, that is okay. Anger can tell you that something mattered, that a boundary was crossed, or that an injustice occurred.

At the same time, carrying intense anger over time can continue to cost you emotional energy while the person who caused the harm remains unchanged. They do not feel your pain in the same way you do. Your anger can serve a purpose - including protection, accountability, or advocacy - without keeping you locked in ongoing conflict with the offender.

The question is not, “Do I have a right to be angry?”

You may have every right to be angry. The question is: What do you want your anger to do for you now? The goal is to shift it toward something that supports your healing, safety, values, or future.

Without looking at a definition, how would you describe forgiveness?

What might you gain if the injustice took up less emotional space in your life?

What concerns do you have about forgiving? *For example: fear of minimizing the harm, losing accountability, or becoming vulnerable again.*

What do you want more of in your future? *Peace, safety, energy, connection, advocacy, confidence, distance, something else?*

2 DECISION PHASE Choose the path that fits you right now

There is no single correct path. Choose one option, combine options, or decide that you are not ready yet. Your decision can be revisited as you heal.

A

☐ **Forgiveness + Compassion**

I want to work toward forgiveness and, if it feels right for me, develop compassion or understanding toward the person who harmed me. Compassion does not mean excusing the behavior.

B

☐ **Forgiveness + Boundaries**

I want to work toward forgiveness while creating or maintaining boundaries that protect me from being harmed again. This may include limited contact, no contact, or other safety limits.

C

☐ **Forgiveness + Advocacy**

I want to work toward releasing the anger that keeps me stuck while using some of that energy for advocacy, accountability, education, protection, or positive change.

D

☐ **A Combination**

I want to combine compassion, boundaries, advocacy, accountability, distance, or other approaches in a way that supports my well-being.

E

☐ **I Am Not Ready Yet**

I am not ready to forgive at this time. I can still work on safety, boundaries, emotional regulation, or deciding what I need before I revisit forgiveness.

My decision right now is:

Why does this choice fit me right now?

You can change your mind

Healing does not require you to make a permanent emotional decision before you are ready.

3 WORK PHASE Put your decision into practice and get feedback from your experience

The work phase should reflect the choice you made in the Decision Phase. You do not have to follow a compassion-based approach if compassion was not part of your decision.

Client check-in: revisit your decision

What did you choose during the Decision Phase?

How do you feel about that decision now?

Does this decision still feel right for you?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Mostly
- ☐ I am unsure
- ☐ No
- ☐ I want to change part of it

What is working about your decision? What, if anything, needs to change?

Practice based on the path you chose

If you chose compassion

Ask: Can I understand something about this person without excusing what they did? Is compassion helping my healing, or does it feel forced?

What, if anything, do you understand differently now?

If you chose boundaries

Ask: What boundary would help me feel safer or more in control? What will I do if that boundary is violated?

The boundary I want to protect is:

3 WORK PHASE Continue practicing your decision

If you chose advocacy

Anger can become energy for meaningful action when it is directed toward something that reflects your values instead of ongoing conflict with the offender. Advocacy may include education, supporting others, reporting wrongdoing, creating resources, strengthening policy, or another constructive action.

What does your anger tell you needs to change?

How could you use that energy constructively?

Check in with your emotions

What feelings do you currently have about the person and what happened?

What has decreased? What has increased?

What still feels unresolved?

Check in with your emotions (continued)

Is your current approach helping you feel more in control of your future? Why or why not?

4 DEEPENING PHASE Notice what has changed because of your decision

The deepening phase focuses on your progress - not on whether you have developed positive feelings toward the offender. Healing might look like less emotional intensity, stronger boundaries, greater peace, more purposeful advocacy, or less time spent mentally returning to what happened.

How have you benefited by your decision? Consider emotional health, behavior, boundaries, relationships, and the time or energy spent thinking about the offender.

Where have you noticed change?

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Emotional health | ☐ Sense of safety |
| ☐ Boundaries | ☐ Relationships |
| ☐ Trust in yourself | ☐ Behavior |
| ☐ Time spent thinking about the offender | ☐ Energy available for your own life |
| ☐ Sense of control over your future | ☐ Use of anger |

What takes up less emotional space than it did before?

What do you have more room for now?

How have your boundaries or your use of anger changed?

What do you want to leave in the past?

What do you want to carry forward?

What boundary, value, or commitment do you want to protect going forward?

Complete this statement: What happened to me is part of my story, but it does not get to decide...

Final reminder

Forgiveness does not require forgetting, reconciliation, compassion, or renewed access. You may forgive and still maintain a boundary. You may forgive and still seek accountability. You may forgive and use your anger to advocate for change. You may forgive and never speak to the person again. And you may take the time you need to decide what forgiveness means for you.

Source note: Adapted from Therapist Aid, "Forgiveness" (© 2017 Therapist Aid LLC). Adaptation, updates, and additional written material by Margaret Robertson, 2026.

If you find yourself in a state of emergency

Do not wait for a routine therapy response.

If you are experiencing a mental health or behavioral health emergency, feel unable to stay safe, or believe you may hurt yourself or someone else, contact emergency or crisis services immediately. Do not wait for a scheduled appointment, voicemail, or email response. If the situation is life-threatening, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department.

Kitsap County

EMERGENCY 911	For a life-threatening emergency or immediate danger, call 911.
SALISH CRISIS 1-888-910-0416	24/7 regional crisis line for Kitsap, Clallam, and Jefferson counties. Crisis counselors provide support, connect callers with local resources, and can coordinate local crisis response when appropriate.
KMHS CRISIS 888-910-0416	Kitsap Mental Health Services provides 24/7 mobile crisis outreach and a Crisis Triage Center for eligible adults. Access crisis services through the Salish Regional Crisis Line above or by texting 988.

Washington State

988 LIFELINE CALL OR TEXT 988	Free, confidential, 24/7/365 support for mental health, substance use, suicidal crisis, or emotional distress. You can also contact 988 if you are worried about someone else.
RECOVERY HELP 1-866-789-1511	Washington Recovery Help Line - 24/7 support and referral for mental health, substance use, and problem gambling concerns.

MAR Mental Health Therapy, PLLC

Crisis-informed care, but not emergency response.

MAR Mental Health Therapy, PLLC does not provide 24/7 crisis or emergency services. Dr. Margaret Robertson has extensive education and clinical experience helping people work through crisis-related concerns, stabilization, trauma, and recovery. When a situation is urgent or life-threatening, use the crisis resources on this page first. After immediate safety needs are addressed, MAR can help support ongoing treatment and recovery.

Website: www.marmentalhealththerapy.com

Email: margaretrobertson2@gmail.com

Email is not monitored continuously and should not be used for urgent or emergency needs.

Crisis resource information verified August 2026 using Washington State Health Care Authority, Kitsap County / Salish BH-ASO, and Kitsap Mental Health Services.