

Introduction

This booklet was created for you to promote healing. Use it daily and it will pay back the time you have invested into it. What you are investing into is the “New Old You”.

The thoughts contained within are far reaching. You and I must remember that inspirational information is like a shower; it does not last more than a day. Please use it wisely. Apply it to yourself; do not beat others with the information just because you have a command of the knowledge.

Knowledge is power only when you use it properly. Use it on yourself and obtain sobriety and stability with this daily.

Find something that strikes you as important for today. Print it, write it out and display it on your fridge, bathroom mirror, car dashboard; anywhere to remind you that you are on a new mind journey.

Love yourself.

Two Wolves

One evening an old Cherokee told his grandson about a battle that goes on inside people.

“My son, the battle is between two 'wolves' inside us all.

One is Evil - It is anger, envy, jealousy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority and ego.

The other is Good. It is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith.”

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather: “Which wolf wins?”

The old Cherokee simply replied, “The one you feed.”

Two Traveling Angels

Two traveling angels stopped to spend the night in the home of a wealthy family. The family was rude and refused to let the angels stay in the mansion's guest room. Instead the angels were given a small space in the cold basement

As they made their bed on the hard floor, the older angel saw a hole in the wall and repaired it. When the younger angel asked why, the older angel replied,

"Things aren't always what they seem."

The next night the pair came to rest at the house of a very poor, but very hospitable farmer and his wife. After sharing what little food they had the couple let the angels sleep in their bed where they could have a good night's rest.

When the sun came up the next morning the angels found the farmer and his wife in tears. Their only cow, whose milk had been their sole income, lay dead in the field.

The younger angel was infuriated and asked the older angel how could you have let this happen? The first man had everything, yet you helped him, she accused. The second family had little but was willing to share everything, and you let the cow die.

"Things aren't always what they seem," the older angel replied.

"When we stayed in the basement of the mansion, I noticed there was gold stored in that hole in the wall. Since the owner was so obsessed with greed and unwilling to share his good fortune, I sealed the wall so he wouldn't find it."

"Then last night as we slept in the farmer's bed, the angel of death came for his wife. I gave him the cow instead.

Things aren't always what they seem."

FEAR

I am fear.

I am the menace that lurks in the paths of life,
never visible to the eye but sharply felt in the heart.

I am the father of despair, the brother of procrastination,
the enemy of progress, the tool of tyranny.

Born of ignorance and nursed on misguided thought,
I have darkened more hopes, stifled more ambitions,
shattered more ideals and prevented more accomplishments
that history could record.

Like the changing chameleon, I assume many disguises.
I masquerade as caution. I am sometimes known as doubt or worry.

But whatever I'm called, I am still fear,
the obstacle of achievement.

I know no master but one. Its name is Understanding.
I have no power but what the human mind gives me,
and I vanish completely when the light of understanding reveals
the facts as they really are, for I am really nothing.

You see, if you have the courage to acknowledge your fears,
you will be taking the first step toward controlling them,
instead of them controlling you.

And if you take the next step toward understanding,
you will be able to move past them
to empathy...perhaps even to love.

Love and hugs,

The Voice of Fear
(False Evidence Appearing Real)

Boundaries for Adult Children of Abuse

What Are Boundaries?

Boundaries are our sense of ourselves, and our perception of how we are different from others physically, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. Boundaries exist for our protection. Our boundaries are not fixed; they change with what we feel and the people we are with. When our boundaries are intact, we know that we have separate feelings, thoughts, and realities. Our boundaries allow us to know who we are in relation to others around us. We need our boundaries to get close to others, since otherwise we would be overwhelmed.

Boundaries ensure that our behavior is appropriate and keeps us from offending others. When we have healthy boundaries, we also know when we are being abused. A person without boundaries will not know when someone is physically, emotionally, or intellectually violating them.

This phenomenon is common to codependents in general and adult children of abuse &/or chemically dependent families in particular, which may account for why so many tend to remain in abusive situations.

Developing boundaries is a core issue for codependents in recovery and nowhere is this more dramatically illustrated than in adult children of abuse &/or chemically dependent families. They need to understand and develop boundaries in order to fully recover and claim their identities.

For the first eighteen months of life, children have no clear idea of who they are and depend entirely on their mother and father for basic needs. During the "terrible twos" a child begins to push away from parents, learns cause and effect thinking, and develops the important skill of saying, "No, I won't!" and "You can't make me." In this important stage of development, children test others around them so they can begin to answer: What is and is not under my control? Will others still care for me if I think for myself? Where do I stop and you begin? These questions must be answered for children to clarify their boundaries.

Children of Abuse &/or Chemically Dependent Families

According to Dr. Stanley Keleman, author of *Your Body Speaks Its Mind*, if children do not say "no," they never affirm themselves. If they don't form and maintain boundaries, they become victimized. Often, saying "no" and "I won't" are the strongest expressions of self-affirmation a child can make.

These assertions protect children and allow them to see themselves as separate from their parents. Healthy mothers and fathers respect this important developmental stage. In abusive &/or chemically dependent families, however, children must adapt to their parents. It is because of this forced adaptation that these children often develop a focus outside of themselves.

In many abusive &/or chemically dependent families, personal space is invaded and emotions are not clearly defined or accepted. Attention is focused on the abusive &/or chemically dependent parent, not the children, who learn to match what they feel to the mood swings of the parent. In other words, if Mom is the abusive &/or chemically dependent parent and Mom is

happy, then the children are happy. When children focus on their parents and neglect themselves, they never develop the inner resources that help them to know how to feel, think, or behave in a given situation. This is the essence of codependency and a damaged boundary system.

Children raised in abusive &/or chemically dependent families for example, may learn quite early that getting angry, having tantrums, and saying "no" are dangerous. For this reason, these children may come to view anger as something to avoid, and separation as disloyalty. They may never quite learn where their boundaries end and another's begin.

If Mom is angry, the children assume they have caused it. If Mom is depressed, the children are depressed and tiptoe around the house. These children may never clearly find their emotional boundaries and have difficulty deciding whose feelings belong to whom.

When children hear phrases such as, "You drive me to drink!" or "If it weren't for you kids, I wouldn't have to take these pills!" they tend to respond to them as if they were true. They don't yet have the ability to evaluate these types of situations. Young children who take these statements literally often come to believe that if they were more studious, perfect, well-behaved or attractive; their parents would not be abusive &/or chemically dependent.

For this reason, these children often develop a sense of responsibility for their parents' welfare that unfortunately does not always diminish over time or with maturity. This sense of over-responsibility results in painful relationships and instills a deep sense of shame for basic human failures or mistakes.

It's no wonder that children raised with unpredictable, abusive parents are confused about their thoughts, feelings, and behavior. It's crucial for children of abusive &/or chemically dependent families to understand the idea of boundaries if they are to reclaim the emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual parts of themselves.

How Are Boundaries Violated?

No parent consciously destroys a child's boundary system. In fact, boundaries are often damaged in the name of love by parents who lack a clear sense of themselves or do not understand the importance of allowing their children to set limits.

Abusive &/or chemically dependent families are usually emotionally, physically, and intellectually abusive. It is important to remember, however, that this abuse can occur in any family where children are raised by anxious, unpredictable parents. Parents affected by compulsive behavior or addiction often lack a clear sense of themselves and are likely to raise children with the same problem. Children raised with undependable parents often become adults with damaged boundaries. The most obvious form of boundary violation occurs in the form of physical abuse or neglect.

Physical Boundaries

We get to know our physical comfort zones through our physical boundaries. When we have healthy physical boundaries, we can determine how close others should come to us. It also means we can determine how and when we want to be touched, and who we will allow to touch us. It means we give that right to others.

Physical boundaries are most often violated by physical violence, incest, or neglect. Children who are touched inappropriately by parents must deny their discomfort and repulsion in order to survive the abuse in the family. If a father makes sexual advances toward his daughter, she'll probably learn to ignore the sensation of her skin crawling, her stomach tying in knots, and having to hold her breath in order not to feel. It is precisely the "turning off" or ignoring of these responses that will make her vulnerable to problems in the future. She may even abuse her own children.

Our bodies and emotions tell us when someone is violating our space. But many children with abusive &/or chemically dependent parents learn to distrust their senses and their emotions. They often ignore bizarre events and treat crises as if they were normal.

When I was speaking to a group of adult children one evening, a fire alarm went off in the hotel. I noticed the audience remained seated even when the smell of smoke became obvious. People began to get up and leave only after I mentioned there was a crisis occurring. This is one example of the perceptual damage that prevents adult children from developing healthy, protective boundary systems.

Another example: A ten-year-old girl was forced each day to give hugs and kisses to her mother, who physically abused her. During a therapy session I asked the child if she minded hugging her mom. The child quietly answered that she did not. When Mom came to pick her up, the girl got out of the chair, took a breath and held it, and went to hug her. While she was embracing her mother, the child pulled in her rib cage and held herself stiffly to avoid bodily contact. Clearly, her body was screaming a message, but she was ignoring it.

Paying attention to her bodily cues would have forced the girl to admit both her fear and her reluctance to let her mother touch her. This pattern of denial, if not stopped, will continue past childhood. As an adult, she may lack the physical boundaries that would protect her from abuse. She will allow herself to be close to people who are not safe. Saddest of all, she won't even trust her senses to know when abuse is occurring. As an adult, she may also begin to form a protective wall of anger and fear instead of a healthy physical boundary. People around her will see that she does not want to be touched, that she is unavailable for intimacy.

When physical boundaries are invaded, the victim often feels a deep sense of shame. Ironically, victims of physical abuse or incest often remain loyal to the people who abuse them. When their physical boundaries are repeatedly violated, victims often feel they are betraying their abuser by setting boundaries. Feeling responsible for this leaves the child with the idea that the intrusion was justified.

Physical neglect often produces children and adults who are greedy for affection. Because their parents rarely comforted them, these children didn't create a physical comfort zone. Chasing after an evasive parent for physical closeness forced them to ignore their own feelings.

As adults, these people often invade the space of others by standing too close, touching others without permission, or allowing others to come too close. Unmet needs in childhood rarely disappear. The lack of physical closeness in childhood contaminates their adulthood. They lose their sense of self in order to satisfy their childhood cravings for intimate bonding.

In order to set physical boundaries, we must be aware of what we are feeling when others get close to us. We have the right to determine how and when people enter our space. We must trust our senses, and if we doubt what our senses reveal, we can ask someone whose opinion we value.

It's important to remember that we are the only experts on our boundaries; that no one can tell us where our comfort zone is. This is something we must determine.

Emotional Boundaries

Emotional boundaries are formed early in our life and are greatly influenced by the nature of the bond with our parents. Emotional boundaries protect us like an internal shield, helping us determine which emotions are ours, and letting us deflect emotions that are not ours. When we have healthy emotional boundaries, we can honestly determine our feelings about any situation, person, place, or thing. If we take responsibility for expressing our emotions and notice the impact of our behavior on others, we have healthy emotional boundaries.

Typically, when parents are irresponsible with their feelings, their children will become irresponsible with theirs. If a father repeatedly rages uncontrollably at his child, that child will inherit feelings of rage and shame. The only way a child avoids this is to have an emotional boundary. Unfortunately, young children do not immediately possess boundaries. If the father were to explain to the child that his rage was his own and had nothing to do with the child's behavior, perhaps this boy or girl would develop an emotional boundary.

Many parents, however, never explain this to their children or deny that it is necessary. This lets the rage move from father to child and to future generations. The child in this family will take on Dad's rage and feel overwhelmed. Then the child may carry this rage into adulthood and dump this rage on his or her children and intimate partners.

Emotional boundaries are damaged in the family by:

- Role Reversal
- Emotional Incest
- Shaming and Humiliation
- Enmeshment

Role reversal occurs when parents do not function as adults, and children become responsible for meeting their parents' needs. In an abusive &/or chemically dependent home, for example, it is common to see the "childification" of parents and the "parentification" of children — the parents' neediness is met by the child and the child's needs are ignored. Children learn quite early to accommodate needy parents, often by emotionally shutting down. Realizing that their parents can't tolerate anger, sadness, or pain, they learn to ignore and deny those feelings, according to Alice Miller, author of *The Drama of the Gifted Child*. Expressing these emotions means risking Mom's love or making Dad sick. The emotions become enemies, and are numbed or feared.

Children raised with reversed roles act like little adults. They often enter adulthood emotionally deformed, believing that their feelings are dangerous, and that their emotions will harm them or others around them.

Emotional Incest occurs when parents share adult secrets with children. These parents treat their children as close adult friends or surrogate spouses. As adults, we have been told secrets we wish we didn't know. We can imagine how children feel when they are told inappropriate information.

Parents who share their intimacies with children tangle their children in an emotional web that prevents growth. Children battling emotional incest are not able to strengthen their boundaries enough to become individuals. The shared secrets become the children's problems to solve, and they become unable to determine whose feelings are whose. This is a sign of a damaged emotional boundary.

Often, as a result of this type of boundary damage, children may feel the unexpressed pain of their parents. As adults they may enter into relationships with people who cannot express their pain. The unspoken agreement is: My partner will feel the pain, and I'll express the feelings for him or her, write Merle A. Possum and Marilyn J. Mason, authors of *Facing Shame: Families in Recovery*.

It is common for these children to become their parents' therapists. They often continue this role into adulthood where intimacy becomes a chance to "help someone do it correctly."

Shaming and humiliation: Parents who constantly humiliate and blame, raise emotionally deprived children. Shame eats away at the bond between parents and children and teaches children to humiliate and shame others as well as themselves. Children hold on to these critical messages, and, by the time they become adults, good and bad messages are constantly at war in their minds. They develop walls instead of boundaries. These people not only reject nurturing and compliments, but also mistrust those who try to get behind their walls.

Adults who were shamed as children for expressing emotions often carry with them an unseen "committee" that criticizes and judges their reactions.

When our emotional boundaries are destroyed, we feel transparent, worthless, and can't accept nurturing from others. We build walls instead of boundaries, and all messages, even good ones, bounce right off. We not only reject compliments and nurturing, but mistrust everyone who tries to come through our walls.

Enmeshment is a term used to describe families in which members must have the same feelings and beliefs as the person in charge. These families appear close and tight, but often feel distant from one another. Enmeshment destroys a child's sense of emotional separateness. These families provide children with a heightened sense of belonging that requires children to give up their emotional autonomy. When our boundaries are damaged by enmeshment, we often become emotionally empty or "emotional sponges." We tend to soak up the feelings around us, allowing others to determine our feelings. Children battling this type of boundary damage find it difficult to develop the tools to discover their feelings. They search outside themselves for definition.

Repairing Emotional Boundaries

We can begin to rebuild damaged emotional boundaries by paying attention to when we feel shame. If we consistently feel shame with certain people, we should ask ourselves if our boundaries are being invaded or abused. Even if we are unsure what the abuse is, we must trust our feelings to help us know.

It may be necessary to set emotional boundaries by explaining to another person, "I don't know why, but every time I'm with you, I don't feel good about myself. So, for right now, I can't be with you."

For those of us whose parents humiliated, criticized, and shamed us, it will be helpful to learn to talk to ourselves without shame and humiliation. Some call this re-parenting. We can comfort ourselves by simply commenting internally on our shame: Okay, I'm doing it to myself again. I'm shaming myself again. Sometimes, this alone diffuses it.

Complimenting ourselves and affirming that we are good people is a helpful tool in unpacking shame. Learning to comfort the little boy or girl inside of us helps feed our imagination with different thoughts and a healthier view of the world.

If our feelings of fear, anger, or pain are consistently overwhelming, we may have to uncover the source of our feelings with the help of a competent therapist. This is a process that often begins with writing about our life, explaining how we think our emotional boundaries were damaged. We state the events and how we felt about them. With a therapist's guidance, we then talk about the events and hopefully why we feel pain and anger. It is the therapist's job to point out the denial and minimizing of situations that people with damaged emotional boundaries often battle with.

It is common, for example, for an adult child of a abuse &/or chemical dependent family to discover some early childhood abuse and talk about it as if it didn't really matter. "When I was young, my mom kept telling me that she would kill herself . . . but it's not really a big deal." Or, when a memory surfaces that involves abuse, an adult child may quickly deny the memories: "I remember Dad telling me about his affair, but I know I must be making this up!" It takes a patient therapist to keep us on track and help us believe the importance of our memories.

Adults who were victims of emotional abuse must learn to trust their feelings. Feelings provide us with an immense amount of wisdom and information. Uncomfortable feelings that may have been dangerous to express in our original families are no longer dangerous. We have a right to be angry when someone offends us. Our fear protects us and even our pain helps us grow. For example, fear helps us know when we are in danger.

If these emotions scare us, we need to think about what we're feeling and why we're feeling it. If this causes us to doubt our feelings, we can check with people we trust to make sure we are not taking on feelings that don't belong to us. We can determine our feelings in any situation.

Intellectual Boundaries

A healthy intellectual boundary lets us trust how we view the world. It allows us to know what we want and need, and helps us to sort out our desires from those of others. A flexible intellectual boundary lets us accept information from the outside world and look at it before we make it "ours."

Intellectual boundaries are blurred by parents who too tightly control their children's perceptions. Often, children who become dependent on their parents to think for them don't develop intellectual boundaries. This kind of relationship encourages dependency and discourages responsibility.

According to Paul Watzlawick, author of *How Real Is Real? Confusion, Disinformation, Communication*, the language we use helps determine our world view. Well-meaning parents can hinder their children's ability to think for themselves with simple statements like, "Don't cross that street, you'll scare me to death!" or, "You know you feel better when you wear that

shirt." These children will learn not to cross the street in heavy traffic, but their reasoning becomes skewed. They will not cross in traffic because they do not want to scare Mom, not because it's dangerous. Similarly, a child will put on a different shirt, not because he or she chooses it, but because the parent makes the choice. This kind of boundary destruction is difficult to repair.

Some parents often assume they know what their children think or feel without asking them. Children who are denied the right to think and feel for themselves often learn to distrust their ideas about the world. If, as children, we are often punished, ridiculed, or overruled for creating our own ideas of our world, we will learn to distrust what we believe.

For example, we might find our father passed out on the floor, smelling of alcohol, while our mother insists he is simply tired and taking a nap. Or our mother might say negative things about our father who is expressing anger about her gambling or frivolous spending which precipitated the family being in great debt. He is portrayed as the bad guy, without mention of the gambling/spending of money, or the cancelled family trip due to lack of funds. Or our grandmother who has a black eye who says she loves her son and that he loves her after he just hit her.

These examples are common in an abusive &/or chemically dependent family. As children, we were often forced to see reality not as it looked to us, but how our parents told us it was. We learned to surrender our reality to theirs. To avoid this surrender, we would have had to possess an intellectual boundary and "buck the system." To maintain our ideas of reality and what is true and not true, we needed nurturing parents to make us confident in our reality. When this guidance was not available, we began to distrust what we thought and felt. Many children of abuse &/or chemical dependence, therefore, believe themselves to be crazy.

Adults who have been raised with this confusion find it very difficult to behave appropriately in many situations. They spend a lot of time figuring out how they "should" see reality. This lack of trust in one's perception is typical of codependency.

Adolescents raised in an atmosphere of distorted reality often will follow whoever is in charge. When teenagers are told that "everyone else is doing it — why don't you?" a damaged intellectual boundary will cause them to mistrust their beliefs and go with the group. Many anti-drug campaigns aimed at youth fail to consider that many young drug users have damaged intellectual boundaries, and they aren't able to say 'No'.

Denial, a powerful tool that allows us to live with pain and an unhealthy environment, also damages intellectual boundaries and represses memory. According to Rene Fredrickson, author of *The Lost Childhood*, children will have problems with denial and will not be able to know truth from lies, or fantasy from reality, when a family lives by the following rules:

Appearances are everything. If the response to any type of abuse is the verbal &/or non-verbal message, "Don't say anything—what will people think?" and the response to bruises from physical abuse is, "Wear long sleeves!" children will learn to deny their pain. After years of this denial, children won't allow themselves to know when they feel pain and when they don't.

The good times are enshrined — the bad times are forgotten. Often in abusive &/or chemically dependent families, good times are used to deny pain. When a child complains about pain, the child might quickly be reminded of a holiday celebration some years ago when there were 40 people for dinner at a festive family gathering. These parents are telling their children to forget

and deny that pain exists. This family clings to one another in a desperate and dishonest way, attempting to prove closeness.

"You are crazy if you think something is wrong here!" This rule more than any other causes immense confusion and denial. Typically, one person in the family will project blame on another family member for discovering the abuse, incest, compulsive behavior, alcoholism/chemical dependence, or other family secrets. Because of this rule, children and adults feel as if they are crazy. This typifies adult children of abusive &/or chemically dependent families who do not know what "normal" is.

Repairing Intellectual Boundaries

An often-used tool to repair intellectual boundaries in codependents is journal writing. It is important, particularly for adult children of abusive &/or chemically dependent families, to take time each day to write their daily perceptions of events -- what they like and dislike, and what they desire.

Adults with damaged intellectual boundaries may fall into the trap of writing for some unseen audience. Or, they may feel their papers will be corrected at the end of each day: words must be spelled correctly, columns must be even, and nasty words can't be used.

We need to reassure ourselves that this journal is only for ourselves, and that no one is to see it without our permission. Keeping this journal in a safe place will provide us with the privacy we need.

We also need to remind ourselves that feeling crazy is different from being crazy. A therapist we trust can reassure us of this. It's a common symptom of children raised with intellectual abuse to feel crazy. When this perception of being crazy occurs, it's helpful to ponder the following: Someone taught me to feel crazy. Who am I still being loyal to? What is it that I've not yet discovered?

Many children of abusive &/or chemically dependent families feel as if they have been on stage most of their lives, saying what they're supposed to say, and thinking what they're supposed to think. It's crucial for us to get off the stage if we want to become honest with ourselves. We often need the guidance of a mentor, a sponsor, or a therapist to help us.

Finally, when others comment on our perception of reality, we can accept or discard it. In order to do this we must slow down enough to ponder what has been said. Sometimes we simply have to let ideas float in the air for a few moments before taking them in. After we practice this technique we'll begin to discover which ideas are good for us and which ones aren't.

Spiritual Boundaries

A spiritual boundary gives us the sense that we are not earthly beings trying to become spiritual, but spiritual beings in human form. This spiritual boundary allows us to believe there is a Power in the universe greater than ourselves.

A healthy spiritual boundary lets us embrace our human-ness. When we grow up with the notion of a Higher Power who loves us unconditionally, we feel we can make mistakes and we'll still be loved. (Hebrew word for mistake has been translated as sin). Infants are not born into this world hating themselves. Healthy children are able to give and receive love. It is the mutilation of our

spiritual boundary that causes us to fall out of love with ourselves and disconnect from our Higher Power.

Children who are spiritually abused often walk in a state of terror. Terror is a combination of shame and fear that promotes perfectionism, shame, and over-controlling behavior.

A friend of mine who is troubled by spiritual abuse put it this way: "It's hard to think of a loving God when you feel so shameful. If you feel you are a mistake, it's hard to hear God's voice saying that He loves you unconditionally."

Spiritual abuse comes in many forms. When parents use God as punishment, children develop a deep sense of shame. Statements like, "You/he/she will go to hell for thinking those things!" or, "God will punish you/he/she for breaking that dish!" instill in the child an inaccurate view of God and a terror that prevents genuine spiritual growth.

Children raised with this view of God see God as they do their parents — violent, unpredictable, and punishing. Embracing the idea of a Higher Power who is loving and forgiving becomes difficult.

A spiritual boundary is also damaged when parents put themselves on a pedestal and don't reveal their humanness to their children. When children come to their parents in pain, they need to be comforted and reassured. If parents turn away their children without comforting or reassuring them, it will be hard for the children to believe that God is loving and kind, since they learn little of love, kindness, and comfort from their parents.

Some families quote Scriptures to cover pain, as if Scriptures should take the place of warm reassurances or hugs. Instead of receiving loving hugs and comfort, the child gets quotes from the Bible. This type of parenting makes a child's spiritual life meaningless. The ritual and words are there, but a sense of love and comfort are missing. In other words, the house is wired for electricity, but no one knows how to plug into it. A damaged spiritual boundary leaves us in doubt about our view of ourselves, our lives, and our Higher Power.

Repairing a Spiritual Boundary

The healing of a spiritual boundary takes time and patience. There is an old saying in working recovery that spirituality is the first thing to go and the last to return. As codependents with damaged boundaries, we live in confusion, often not separating our physical, mental, or emotional reality from others. As we emerge from the confusion and pain caused by damaged boundaries, we begin to reach a clarity that invites us to consider our spiritual lives. We must first realize our separateness in order to feel a sense of oneness or spiritual union. Eventually our ideas about God must be our own.

As we repair damaged boundaries, we begin to take the risk of establishing close, healthy relationships. When we are able to form deep connections with others, we begin to see a part of ourselves that is spiritual. As our beauty is reflected back to us, we begin to consider that we are indeed magnificent, that we are unique expressions of God. If you are not getting positive feedback regarding your progress either you are with overly abusive people or you are deceiving yourself into thinking you are progressing. This is when we have talked the talk and not walked the walk. Often we try to enmesh our loved ones in our progress thinking if they change, we don't have to work so hard. This is not working our program. Each person must work their own. As we change our loved ones will continue to change on their own. It is not our

responsibility to get them to change with us. We think we want this, which is due to our insecurity.

By repairing damaged boundaries, we discover who we are. The process of knowing our reality from the reality of others requires us to look inward, where we may find our true spiritual identity. Codependency implies that we are alienated from our feelings, beliefs, and behaviors. As we reclaim our thoughts and emotions, we truly come home to ourselves. There, we gradually develop our ideas of a Higher Power that are not dependent on other people's beliefs, both in the past and present. This is important if we are to leave behind destructive notions of a violent, punishing God or a belief that is not specifically our own from our personal experience of Higher Power.

Treating ourselves with gentleness and firmness through this process is crucial. As our spirituality returns or is established for the first time, we see the emergence of childlike qualities that were buried deep in us. Spontaneity, flexibility, humor, joy, play, laughter, and risk-taking let us believe the idea of a loving, accepting, and forgiving God. Enjoy these childlike qualities but be firm to not stay there and shirk adult responsibilities. This shirking comes in the form of manipulation, victiming (acting helpless in some way), etc.

The following affirmations can help us to repair a damaged spiritual boundary.

I am a beloved child of God/Higher Power/Universe etc.
I am allowed to make mistakes.
I am protected and supported in the loving hands of God.

Learning where we end and others begin does take practice. Setting our limits with others takes courage. It is not just a matter of setting limits on their behavior with us. Easily overlooked is how we need to set limits on ourselves in regards to our behavior with others' boundaries. We must look at our controlling and enmeshment behaviors to find how and where we have infringed into others' lives. We typically have thought that we knew how things SHOULD be and tried, often covertly, to make it so. This is called manipulation. The excitement that comes with establishing our boundaries is well worth the effort. In the end, we have a clearer identity and a stronger sense of dignity.

Do not expect others to automatically appreciate the effort it takes to establish clear boundaries. Those close to us may become upset that we are forming a separate identity, especially if they are enmeshed with us involving the Victim, Rescuer, Persecutor Triangle. On the other hand, those whom we have tried to control will be relieved that we are finally minding our own business. Be assured, however, that as our physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual realities become clear and strong, relationships will become healthier and more satisfying.

In the end, it is up to us to form our boundaries with others and show respect and consideration for the boundaries of others. No one can do this for us. Repairing damaged boundaries may require the guidance of a mentor, sponsor, or a therapist, but the responsibility for our healing lies with us.

About the Publication:

So much of recovery from codependence has to do with figuring out where we stop and where another person begins. Growing up in an abusive &/or chemically dependent family or dysfunctional family often prevents us from creating healthy physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual boundaries. This publication offers meaningful insight on how to build healthy boundaries.

Healthy Individual Responsibilities

(We are responsible for our own and no one else's)

FLABBY D. CAT

Feelings: How we FEEL in reaction to life and people.

Love: Who we GIVE love to and who we ACCEPT/RECEIVE it from.

Attitude: Positive or Negative - cup half empty or half full.

Beliefs: What you accept to be true.

Behavior: How we ACT on our thoughts and feelings.

Yes/No: We decide What/Who we say "YES" or "NO" to.

Desires: What we WANT, not what we NEED for life.

Choices: And the consequences of our choices.

Abilities: We are responsible for how we USE or SQUANDER our abilities.

Thoughts: What we allow our mind to DWELL ON or TURN AWAY FROM.

Thus, *Flabby D. Cat* can guide you thru many rough roads. If you follow the cat's tail you'll be happy, healthy and sane. >^..^<

All you can do is all you can do,

And all you can do is good enough.

Best IS Best!!! You cannot create "Bestest."

Summary Of Basic Communication Skills For Improving Interview Performance & Interpersonal Relationships

1. **PARAPHRASE:** Stating in your own way what the other's remark conveys to you.

Examples: *"Would this be an example of the point you made?" (Then stating a specific example)*

"Do you mean... (stating your understanding of other's words)?"

2. **BEHAVIOR DESCRIPTION:** Reporting specific, observable actions of others without making accusations or generalizations about their motives, personality or character traits.

Examples: *"That's the third time you have said you agreed with a statement of mine and then added 'but' & expressed agreement with the opposite." "Jim and Harry have done nearly all the talking and the rest of us have said very little."*

3. **DESCRIPTION OF FEELINGS:** Specifying or identifying feelings by name, simile, figure of speech, or action urge.

Describing your own feelings: Reporting your own inner state as explicitly as you can - making sure the statement indicates the feelings are in you.

Examples: "I feel... embarrassed." (Naming)

... like a tiny frog in a huge pond." (Simile)

... like hugging you." (Action urge.)

"I just swallowed a bushel of spring sunshine." (Figure of speech)

"I'm very fond of you. I care about you." (Naming)

Perception check: Describing what you perceive to be the other's inner state in order to check whether you do understand what he/she feels.

Examples: "You look like you felt hurt by my comment. Did you?"

"I get the impression you'd like to change the subject. Is that accurate?"

"You seem to be feeling more at home now."

TO UNDERSTAND THE OTHER AS A PERSON

- Check to make sure you understand his/her ideas, information, and suggestions as he/she intended them. (Skill: *Paraphrase*)
- Check to make sure you accurately understand what he/she feels...his/her inner state. (Skill: *Perception Check*)

TO HELP OTHERS UNDERSTAND YOU AS A PERSON

- Describe what others did that affects you personally or as a group member. (Skill: *Behavior Description*)
- Let others know as clearly and unambiguously as possible what you are feeling. (Skill: *Description of your own feelings*)

John L. Wallen

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

Anger and Conflict Management

Speak when you are angry and you will make the best speech you will regret. It is possible to learn to manage anger and conflict. Anger and conflict can be destructive but they can also provide the energy to increase awareness and deepen relationships.

Anger is a normal, healthy emotion. Conflict is normal. No two people are alike. How this is managed is the key. Anger can be talked out or acted out. Acting out is usually aggressive and not constructive. The aim in acting out is to overpower and hurt.

Anger denied or repressed is often the cause of depression. Anger can produce the unpleasant physical reactions associated with stress.

Learning about your anger and how to handle conflict and find solutions increases problem solving ability, communication and personal maturity.

Sometimes there are styles of negatively managing anger and conflict. See if you can recognize your style(s). Once you gain insight, you can plan for a change.

1. **The Firecracker** - a quick highly charged explosion of blaming, then calm takes over. It may be "letting off steam". The person who is targeted may find this difficult.
2. **The Visit to Iceland** - classic cold shoulder. The punishment is silence and rejection. Sometimes it becomes a contest-who will give in first. Breeds resentment and rarely solves problems.
3. **The Memory Lane Rehash** - choice hurts are stored up and brought up as weapons. The argument moves quickly from present to past. Tremendous energy is wasted and current issues are lost.
4. **The Social Zinger** - verbal darts or insults are thrown out in social setting - put down humor, gossip. The person under attack may not know what the issue is.
5. **Trivia Fights** - arguments about the toothpaste cap, dressing style, or other small behaviors. Bits of social trivia can be used in a I know this and such and you don't; a type like of one-up-man-ship, based on knowledge is power. (This may divert attention from the "real issue". There is no growth, just constant picking at little things.
6. **The Guerilla Fighter** - harassment and sabotage, indirectly attack the "enemy" who is slowly worn down.

7. **Gang fights** - enlist family, friends, neighbors and anyone you know. Makes sure everyone knows how oppressed you are and how bad the other person is. This puts people in the middle and others may fight your battles for you.
8. **The Last Word** - this conflict is never permitted to end. This method always signals the lack of ability to sit down and work things out.
9. **The Provocateur** - the "button-pusher" - A person attempts to make the other lose control. This usually produces a counter-attack, down and dirty. The aim is to hurt the other person emotionally, not to solve problems.
10. **The Semi-Annual Free For All** - These fights seem to occur every six to eight months. They are explosive and quickly escalate to total war. Things build up slowly. This indicates an inability to manage conflict as it comes up.

Once you recognize your style(s) you are free to choose other behaviors and improve your communication. We often use more than one style, depending on the situation and the resources available.

Keep in Mind

1. **In resolving conflicts the only healthy outcome is two winners.** You will have to fight the gut instinct to win. Otherwise you have a powerful punishing "winner" and a resentful "victim". The self-esteem of both parties is diminished. Try to protect your self-esteem and that of the other person.
2. **Accept anger and conflict as normal and when used in a healthy way they can promote growth.** This will involve talking about your feelings and issues.
3. **Agree to Disagree if responses on either part become over emotional or punishing.** An emotional discussion can escalate out of control. When these turn to aggression there are two losers. Learn to agree to stop for awhile. Practice "letting go".

Codependent Triangle

PERSECUTOR

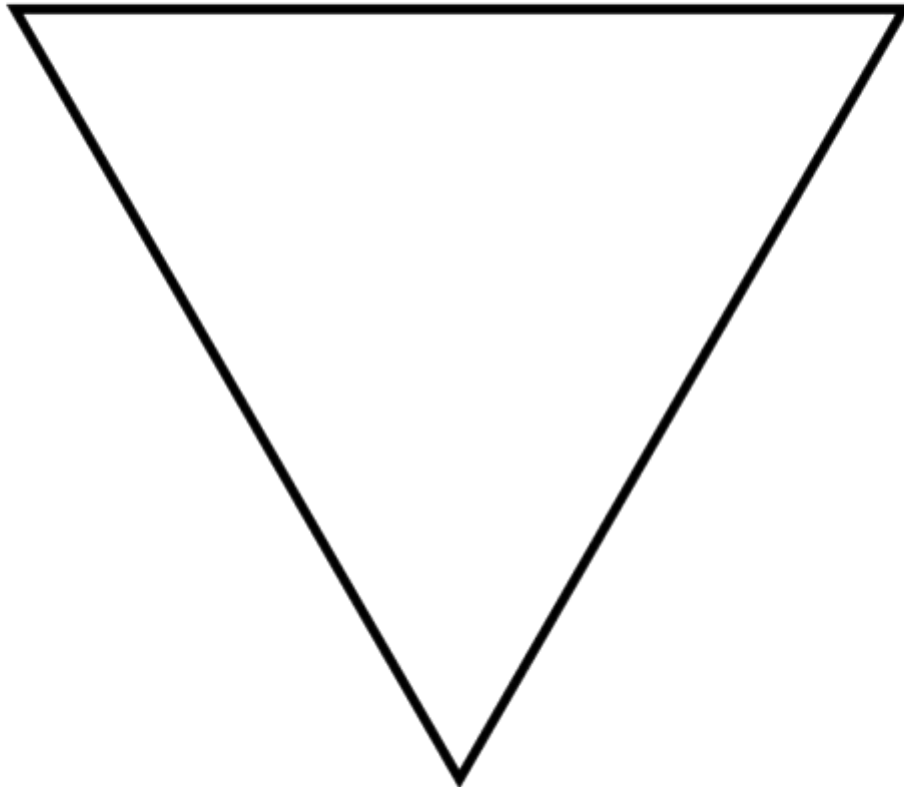
"It's All Your Fault"

Power Role

RESCUER

"Let me help you"

Enabling Role



VICTIM

"Poor Me"

Safe Role

The Codependent Triangle is usually represented as a triangle with its point facing downward, with the persecutor and rescuer at the top and the victim at the bottom. This shows that the Persecutor and Rescuer both assume a position of power over the Victim.

- *A person shifts from one role to another freely according to their desires of the moment.*
- *This is a learned style of relating, therefore it can be unlearned and new functional style can be learned and implemented.*

Victim Role

Victims are helpless and hopeless. They deny responsibility for their negative consequences of their actions, negative circumstances and deny possession of the power to change them. They do less than 50%, won't take a stand, act "super-sensitive", wanting kid glove treatment, and pretend impotence and incompetence.

It's the person who is always complaining about how he's being wronged and how terrible circumstances are but never taking the initiative to change things. The victim conveys a message of helplessness, whether it is spoken or implied. Someone playing the victim role believes things are done to him or her, not because of him or her.

- Feels victimized, oppressed, helpless, hopeless, powerless, ashamed
- Looks for a Rescuer that will perpetuate their negative feelings.
- If stays in Victim position, will block self from making decisions, solving problems, experiencing pleasure and self-understanding.
- "Dejected" stance.

Rescuer Role

Rescuers are constantly applying short-term repairs to a Victim's problems, while neglecting their own needs. They are always working hard to "help" other people. They are harried, tired, and often have physical complaints. They are usually angry underneath and may be a loud or quiet martyr in style. They use guilt to get their way.

The rescuer thinks he or she is the hero. Rather than support others, the rescuer tries to save others. The rescuer's help seems to come with an agenda, whether it is a condescending tone or a martyr mentality. Someone who is playing this role finds it much easier, safer and more interesting and safe to focus on other people's issues than their own. What's worse is that this attitude engenders a condescending attitude, that is often a big turn off to others.

- Rescues when really doesn't want to.
- Feels guilty if doesn't rescue.
- Keeps victim dependent.
- Gives permission to fail.
- Expects to fail in rescue attempts.
- "Marshmallow" Parent

Persecutor Role

Blame the Victims and criticize the enabling behavior of Rescuers, without providing guidance, assistance or a solution to the underlying problem. They are critical and unpleasant and good at finding fault. They often feel inadequate underneath. They control with threats, order, and rigidity. They can be loud or quiet in style and sometimes be a bully.

The persecutor is the person walking around with a chip on their shoulder. Where the victim whines and complains about what is going wrong, the persecutor takes matters into his or her

own hands and strikes back. This isn't always in a full-frontal attack though. Persecutors often harm others by withholding or being passive-aggressive. You can cause just as much harm (sometimes more) by withdrawing and being inactive as you can by attacking them directly.

- Sets strict limits unnecessarily
- Blames
- Criticizes
- Keeps Victim oppressed
- Is mobilized by anger
- Rigid, authoritative stance
- "Critical" Parent

Codependence Is an Addiction

We often, as Americans, are unaware that we are addicts at all. We live and thrive in an addict society. Yet few really know it. We are raised in that environment. Even our TVs tell us to be so. This is a great disservice to our psyche.

Let us define the dynamics of codependent thinking. We process all of life through a filter which says we must either be in the *VICTIM*, *RESCUER* or *PERSECUTOR* role to function. That's all there is. The problem is that there are ramifications if we always stay in that role cycle; we NEVER experience REAL love, intimacy, honesty or truly treasure anyone. We don't trust, plain and simple. So we try to control and manipulate our way through life.

We and everyone with us is miserable, but no one knows it, for everyone is BLAMING everyone and everything else, never themselves. Not that we as individuals can cause the totality of anything, but we CERTAINLY have a contribution to all that goes on around us, including the outcomes of our actions. We are not responsible for other's feelings, thoughts/attitudes, actions, beliefs/values, desires, choices; but we are most certainly responsible for those in ourselves.

We become behaviorally addicted to this cycle of insanity because we were raised in this dynamic, so to us it is utterly comfortable; so comfortable that anything different, as far as a style of relating to others and to life in general, seems strange if not abusive at times. Out of our fear we stay entrenched in a society which is utterly miserable.

Be alive. Fight the addiction to SAMENESS. Confront yourself and eventually find yourself, after work and dedication, to be a most wonderful person. Your joy in life will increase 10 if not 100 fold. So embrace the reality that you really are a beautiful person under the guise of control and manipulation. You have been trying to control your reality to look the same as you were raised in. Don't buy it. Follow a new path. Sing a new song: your own.

“That which is not acted upon is not learned”

Codependence in Wounded Warriors

Codependency is a vicious form of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

"Codependence is a very vicious and powerful form of Delayed Stress Syndrome. The trauma of feeling like we were not safe in our own homes makes it very difficult to feel like we are safe anywhere. Feeling like we were not lovable to our own parents makes it very difficult to believe that anyone can Love us."

Codependence is being at war with ourselves - which makes it impossible to trust and Love ourselves. Codependence is denying parts of ourselves so that we do not know who we are.

Recovery from the disease of Codependence involves stopping the war within so that we can get in touch with our True Self, so that we can start to Love and trust ourselves.

"The war we were born into, the battlefield each of us grew up in, was not in some foreign country against some identified "enemy" - it was in the "homes" which were supposed to be our safe haven with our parents whom we Loved and trusted to take care of us. It was not for a year or two or three - it was for sixteen or seventeen or eighteen years."

"Instead of blood and death (although some do experience blood and death literally), what happened to us as children was spiritual death and emotional maiming, mental torture and physical violation."

Codependence as Delayed Stress Syndrome

*"In a war, soldiers are forced to deny their emotions in order to survive. This emotional denial works to help the soldier survive the war, but later can have devastating delayed consequences. The medical profession has now recognized the trauma and damage that this emotional denial can cause, and have coined a term to describe the effects of this type of denial. That term is **Delayed Stress Syndrome**."*

In a war soldiers have to deny what it feels like to see friends killed and maimed; what it feels like to kill other human beings and have them attempting to kill you. There is trauma caused by the events themselves. There is trauma due to the necessity of denying the emotional impact of the events. There is trauma from the effects the emotional denial has on the person's life after he/she has returned from the war because as long as the person is denying his/her emotional trauma she/he is denying a part of her/himself.

The stress caused by the trauma, and the effect of denying the trauma, by denying self, eventually surfaces in ways which produce new trauma - anxiety, alcohol and drug abuse, nightmares, uncontrollable rage, inability to maintain relationships, inability to hold jobs, suicide, etc.

Codependence is a form of Delayed Stress Syndrome.

Instead of blood and death (although some do experience blood and death literally), what happened to us as children was spiritual death and emotional maiming, mental torture and physical violation. We were forced to grow up denying the reality of what was happening in our homes. We were forced to deny our feelings about what we were experiencing and seeing and sensing. We were forced to deny ourselves.

We grew up having to deny the emotional reality: of parental alcoholism, addiction, mental illness, rage, violence, depression, abandonment, betrayal, deprivation, neglect, incest, etc. etc.; of our parents fighting or the underlying tension and anger because they weren't being honest enough to fight; of dad's ignoring us because of his workaholicism and/or mom smothering us because she had no other identity than being a mother; of the abuse that one parent heaped on another who wouldn't defend him/herself and/or the abuse we received from one of our parents while the other wouldn't defend us; of having only one parent or of having two parents who stayed together and shouldn't have; etc., etc.

We grew up with messages like: children should be seen and not heard; big boys don't cry and little ladies don't get angry; it is not okay to be angry at someone you love - especially your parents; god loves you but will send you to burn in hell forever if you touch your shameful private parts; don't make noise or run or in any way be a normal child; do not make mistakes or do anything wrong; etc., etc.

We were born into the middle of a war where our sense of self was battered and fractured and broken into pieces. We grew up in the middle of battlefields where our beings were discounted, our perceptions invalidated, and our feelings ignored and nullified.

The war we were born into, the battlefield each of us grew up in, was not in some foreign country against some identified "enemy" - it was in the "homes" which were supposed to be our safe haven with our parents whom we Loved and trusted to take care of us. It was not for a year or two or three - it was for sixteen or seventeen or eighteen years.

We experienced what is called "*sanctuary trauma*" - our safest place to be was not safe - and we experienced it on a daily basis for years and years. Some of the greatest damage was done to us in subtle ways on a daily basis because our sanctuary was a battlefield.

It was not a battlefield because our parents were wrong or bad - it was a battlefield because they were at war within, because they were born into the middle of a war. By doing our healing we are becoming the emotionally honest role models that our parents never had the chance to be. Through being in Recovery we are helping to break the cycles of self-destructive behavior that have dictated human existence for thousands of years.

Codependence is a very vicious and powerful form of *Delayed Stress Syndrome*. The trauma of feeling like we were not safe in our own homes makes it very difficult to feel like we are safe anywhere. Feeling like we were not lovable to our own parents makes it very difficult to believe that anyone can Love us.

Codependence is being at war with ourselves - which makes it impossible to trust and Love ourselves. Codependence is denying parts of ourselves so that we do not know who we are.

Recovery from the disease of Codependence involves stopping the war within so that we can get in touch with our True Self, so that we can start to Love and trust ourselves."

Excerpt from: *Codependence: The Dance of Wounded Souls* by Robert Burney

On Being Positive

Time flies. It's up to you to be the navigator.

~ Robert Orben

Learning is not compulsory... neither is survival.

~ W. Edwards Deming

If you don't think every day is a good day, just try missing one.

~ Cavett Robert

Do what you can, with what you have, where you are.

~ Theodore Roosevelt

The doors of wisdom are never shut.

~ Ben Franklin

Our words reveal our thoughts; Our manners mirror our self-esteem;

Our actions reflect our character; Our habits predict the future.

~ William Arthur Ward

There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it.

~ Edith Wharton

Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase.

~ Martin Luther King

Decision is the spark that ignites action. Until a decision is made nothing happens.

~ Wilfred A. Peterson

He that cannot forgive others breaks the bridge over which he, himself, must pass.

~ Lord Herbert

It's not where you start - it's where you finish that counts.

Regardless of your lot in life, you can build something beautiful on it.

You can have everything in life you want if you will just help enough other people get what they want.

What you get by achieving your goals is not as important as what you become by achieving your goals.

Repetition is the mother of learning, the father of action, which makes it the architect of accomplishment.

~ Zig Ziglar

Letting Go

*Letting go does not mean to stop caring;
it means I can't do it for someone else.*

*Letting go is not to cut myself off;
it's the realization I can't control another.*

*Letting go is not to enable;
but to allow learning from natural consequences.*

*Letting go is to admit powerlessness;
which means the outcome is not in my hands.*

*Letting go is not to try to change or blame another;
it's to make the most of myself.*

*Letting go is not to care for;
but to care about.*

*Letting go is not to fix;
but to be supportive.*

*It's not to judge;
but to allow another to be a human being.*

*Letting go is not to be in the middle arranging the outcome;
but to allow others to affect their own destinies.*

*Letting go is not to be protective;
it's to permit another to face reality.*

*Letting go is not to deny;
but to accept.*

*Letting go is not to nag, scold, or argue;
but instead to search out my own shortcomings and correct them.*

*Letting go is not to adjust everything to my own desires;
but to take each day as it comes and cherish myself in it.*

*Letting go is not to criticize and regulate anybody;
but to try to become what I dream I can be.*

*Letting go is not to regret the past;
but to grow and live for the future.*

Letting go is to fear less and live more.

Emotional Blackmail

What is Emotional Blackmail?

Emotional blackmail is a powerful form of manipulation in which people close to us threaten (either directly or indirectly) to punish us if we don't do what they want. At the heart of any kind of blackmail is one basic threat, which can be expressed in many different ways: ***If you don't behave the way I want you to, you will suffer.***

A criminal blackmailer might threaten to use knowledge about a person's past to ruin her reputation, or ask to be paid off in cash to hide a secret. Emotional blackmail hits closer to home. Emotional blackmailers know how much we value our relationship with them. They know our vulnerabilities. Often they know our deepest secrets. And no matter how much they care about us, when they fear they won't go their way, they use this intimate knowledge to shape the threats that give them the payoff they want: *our compliance*.

Knowing that we want love or approval, our blackmailers threaten to withhold it or take it away altogether, or make feel we must earn it. For example, if you pride yourself being generous and caring, the blackmailer might label you selfish or inconsiderate if you don't accede to his wishes. If you value money and security, the blackmailer might attach conditions to providing them or threaten to take them away. And if you believe the blackmailer, you could fall into a pattern of letting him control your decisions and behavior. We get locked into a dance with blackmail, a dance with myriad steps, shapes and partners.

Emotional blackmailers hate to lose. They take the old adage "It doesn't matter if you win or lose, its how you play the game", and turn it on its head to read "It doesn't matter how you play the game as long as you do not lose." To an emotional blackmailer, keeping your trust doesn't count, respecting your feelings doesn't count, being fair doesn't count. The ground rules that allow for healthy give-and-take go out the window. In the midst of what we thought was a solid relationship it's as though someone yelled "Everyone for himself!" and the other person lumped to take advantage of us while our guard was down. Why is winning so important to blackmailers, we ask ourselves. Why are they doing this to us? Why do they need to get their way so badly that they'll punish us if they don't?

Blackmail takes two: it is a transaction. Following clarity comes change. It's easy to focus on other people's behavior and to think that if they change things will be fine. The change has to begin with the blackmail target. **Our compliance rewards the blackmailer, and every time we reward someone for a particular action, whether we realize it or not, we're letting them know in the strongest possible terms that they can do it again.** The price we pay when we repeatedly give in to emotional blackmail is enormous. It eats away at us and escalates until it puts our most important relationships and our whole sense of self-respect in jeopardy.

Part 1: Understanding the Blackmail Transaction

What Emotional Blackmailers Do

- Threaten to make things difficult if you don't do what they want.
- Constantly threaten to end the relationship if you don't give in.
- Regularly ignore or discount your feelings and wants.
- Tell you or imply that they will neglect, hurt themselves, or become depressed if you don't do what they want.
- Shower you with approval when you give into them and take it away when you don't.
- Use money as a weapon to get their own way.

Components of Emotional Blackmail

The issues may differ, but the tactics and actions will be the same, and clearly recognizable.

1. **Demand**--someone wants something
2. **Resistance**--the other does not feel comfortable with the demand
3. **Pressure**--used to make the resistant one give in
4. **Threat**--to turn up the pressure
5. **Compliance**--on the part of the resistant one
6. **Repetition**--this pattern reoccurs in at least other situations (just with a different name)

Examples of Emotional Blackmail

- “If I ever see another man look at you I will kill him.”
- “If you ever stop loving me I will kill myself.”
- “I've already discussed this with our pastor/therapist/friends/family and they agree that you are being unreasonable.”
- “I'm taking this vacation - with or without you.”
- “Your family hates me. How can you say you love me and still be friends with them?”
- “You've ruined my life and now you are trying to stop me from spending money to take care of myself.”
- “I took the money because you always put yourself first and don't seem to care about my needs.”

The Four Types of Blackmailers

1. **Punishers** (“*If you go back to work, I will leave you*”) let us know exactly what they want, and the consequences we'll face if we don't give it to them, are the most glaring. They may express themselves aggressively or they may smolder in silence, but either way, the anger is always aimed directly at us. The closer the relationship, the higher the stakes and the more vulnerable we are to punishers. When blackmail escalates, the threatened consequences of not acceding to a punisher can be alarming: abandonment, emotional cutoff, withdrawal of money or other resources. Explosive anger directed at us. And, at the most terrifying extreme, threats of physical harm.

2. **Self-punishers** (“*Don’t argue with me or I will get sick or depressed*”) turn the threats inward threatening what they will do to themselves if they don't get their way. High drama, hysteria and an air of crisis (precipitated by you, of course) surround self-punishers, who are often excessively needy and dependent. They often enmesh themselves with those around them and struggle with taking responsibility with their own lives. The ultimate threat self-punishers can make is frightening in the extreme: It's a suggestion that they will kill themselves.
3. **Sufferers** are talented blamers and guilt-peddlers who make us figure out what they want, and always conclude that it is up to us to ensure they get it. Sufferers take the position that if they feel miserable, sick, unhappy, or are just plain unlucky, there's only one solution: our giving them what they want ' even if they haven't told us what it is. They let us know, in no uncertain terms, that if you don't do what they want, they will suffer and it will be your fault. Sufferers are pre-occupied with how awful they feel, and often they interpret your inability to read their mind as proof that you don't care enough about them.
4. **Tantalizers** put us through a series of test and hold out a promise of something wonderful if we'll just give them their way. They are the subtlest blackmailers. They encourage us and promise love or money or career advancement, and then make it clear that unless we behave, as they want us to, we don't get the prize. Every seductively wrapped package has a web of strings attached. Many tantalizers traffic in emotional payoffs, castles in the air full of love, acceptance, family closeness and healed wounds. Admission to this rich, unblemished fantasy requires only one thing: giving in to what the tantalizer wants.

Each type of blackmailer operates with a different vocabulary, and each gives a different spin to the demands, pressure, threats and negative judgments that go into blackmail. There are no firm boundaries between the styles of blackmail, as they can be combined.

Emotions Felt by Victims of Emotional Blackmail

- They feel insecure, unimportant, unworthy and generally bad about themselves.
- They doubt their ideas and needs.
- They feel isolated.
- They may have consistent physical ailments as a result of the stress.

Characteristics of the Victim and Emotional Blackmailer

Victim:

- Constantly seeks approval
- Does their best to avoid anger and keep peace
- Takes the blame for anything that happens to others
- Has compassion and empathy
- Tends to feel pity or obligation

- Believes they need to give in because it is the “right thing to do”
- Has self-doubt with no sense of their worth, intelligence or abilities

Emotional Blackmailer:

- Has great fear of abandonment and deprivation or of being hurt.
- Feels desperate.
- Needs to be in control of things.
- Experiences frequent frustration.
- Has thought distortions regarding the reasonableness of their demands.
- Has had someone emotionally blackmail them and sees that it works to get them what they want.

A Blinding FOG

Blackmailers create a thick '**FOG**' that obscures their actions. **FOG** is a shorthand way of referring to **Fear**, **Obligation** and **Guilt**. Blackmailers pump up an engulfing FOG into their relationships, ensuring that we feel afraid to cross them, obligated to give them their way and terribly guilty if we don't.

Fear, the Real F-Word

Blackmailers build their conscious and unconscious strategies on the information we give them about what we fear. The blackmailers fear of not getting what they want becomes so intense that they become tightly focused, able to see the outcome they want in exquisite detail but unable to take their eyes off the goal long enough to see how their actions are affecting us. At that point, the information they've gathered about us in the course of the relationship becomes ammunition for driving home a deal that's fed on both sides by fear. One of the most painful parts of emotional blackmail is that it violates the trust that has allowed us to reveal ourselves.

Obligation

Often our ideas about duty and obligation are reasonable, and they form an ethical and moral foundation for our lives. Sometimes these are out of balance. Blackmailers never hesitate to put our sense of obligation to the test. Reluctance to break up a family keeps many people in relationships that have gone sour. Most of us have a terrible time defining our boundaries when our sense of obligation is stronger than our sense of self-respect and self-caring; blackmailers quickly learn to take advantage.

Guilt

Guilt is an essential part of being a feeling, responsible person. It's a tool of conscience, in its distorted form, registers discomfort and self-reproach if we've done something to violate our personal or social code of ethics. One of the fastest ways for blackmailers to create undeserved guilt is to use blame, actively attributing whatever upset or problems they're having to their targets. Once blackmailers see that their target's guilt can serve them, time becomes irrelevant. There is no statute of limitations. Guilt is the

blackmailer's neutron bomb. It can leave relationships standing, but it wears away the trust and intimacy that makes us want to be with them.

Tools the Emotional Blackmailer Uses to Create FOG

- Making demands seem reasonable.
- Making the victim feel selfish.
- Labeling with negative qualities and connotations.
- Pathologizing or crazy making.
- Making a demand that needs an immediate response.
- Allying themselves with someone of authority or influence i.e. parents, children, mental health professionals, religious leaders etc.
- Comparing the victim to a person that the victim does not like or is in competition with. Learning the victim's "triggers".
- Assess how much pressure to apply before the victim will give in.

Tools of the Trade

The tools are a constant that runs through the endlessly varied scenarios of emotional blackmail, and all blackmailers, no matter what their style, use one or more of them:

The Spin

Blackmailers see our conflicts with them as reflections of how misguided and off base we are, while they describe themselves as wise and well intentioned. They let us know that they ought to win because the outcome they want is more loving, more open, more mature. Any resistance on our parts is transformed from an indication of our needs to evidence of our flaws. In addition to discrediting the perceptions of their targets, many blackmailers turn up the pressure by challenging our character, motives, and worth. We may be labeled heartless, worthless or selfish in any relationship with a blackmailer, but those labels are especially difficult to withstand when they're coming from a parent who can wipe out our confidence faster than anyone else.

Pathologizing

Some blackmailers tell us that we're resisting them only because we're ill or crazy. This is called pathologizing. The experience of being pathologized can be a devastating blow to our confidence and sense of self and is therefore an especially toxic and effective tool.

Pathologizing often arises in love relationships when there's an imbalance of desires more love, more time, more attention, more commitment when it's not forthcoming, he/she questions our ability to love. Like the spin, pathologizing makes us unsure about our memories, our judgments, our intelligence, and our character. With pathologizing the stakes are higher, and can make us doubt our sanity.

Enlisting Allies

When single-handed attempts at blackmail are effective, black-mailers call in reinforcements (parents, children, mental health professionals, religious leaders etc.), to make their case for them and to prove that they are right. They may turn to a higher authority such as the bible.

Negative comparisons

Blackmailers often hold up another person as a model, a flawless ideal against which we fall short. Negative comparisons make us feel suddenly deficient. We react competitively.

The Inner World of the Blackmailer

Emotional blackmailers hate to lose. Blackmailers can't tolerate frustration. To the blackmailer, frustration is connected to deep, resonant fears of loss and deprivation, and they experience it as a warning that unless they take immediate action they'll face intolerable consequences. These convictions may be rooted in a lengthy history of feeling anxious and insecure. Complementing and reinforcing possible genetic factors are powerful messages from our caretakers and society about whom we are and how we are supposed to behave. Blackmailers believe that they can compensate for some of the frustrations of the past by changing the current reality.

The potential for blackmail rises dramatically during such crises as a separation or divorce, loss of a job, illness and retirement, which undermine blackmailers' sense of themselves as valuable people. Often people who have had everything and have been overprotected and indulged have had little opportunity to develop confidence in their ability to handle any kind of loss. At the first hint that they might be deprived, they panic, and shore themselves up with blackmail.

Usually blackmailers focus totally on their needs, their desires; they don't seem to be the least bit interested in our needs or how their pressure is affecting us. They often behave as though each disagreement is the make-or-break factor in the relationship.

Blackmailers frequently win with tactics that create an insurmountable rift in the relationship. Yet the short-term victory often appears to be enough of a triumph ' as if there were no future to consider. Most blackmailers operate from an I-want-what-I want-when-I-want it mind-set. Any logic or ability to see the consequences of their actions is obscured by the urgency blackmailers feel to hold on to what they have.

The most important thing to take away from the tour of a blackmailer's psyche is that emotional blackmailer sounds like it's all about you and feels like it's all about you, but for the most part it's not about you at all. Instead it flows from and tries to stabilize some fairly insecure places inside the blackmailer. Many times it has more to do with the past than the present, and it's more concerned with filling the blackmailer's needs than with anything the blackmailer says we did or didn't do.

It Takes Two

Blackmail cannot work without the target's active participation. The target gives it permission to occur. You may be aware of the blackmail but feel as though you can't resist it, because the blackmailer's pressure sets off almost programmed responses in you, and you're reacting automatically or impulsively.

Blackmailers may be aware of your hot buttons. Faced with resistance, blackmailers' fear of deprivation kicks in and they use every bit of information to ensure that they prevail. The protective qualities that we have that open us up to emotional blackmail are:

- An excessive need for approval.
- An intense fear of anger.
- A need for peace at any price.
- A tendency to take too much responsibility for other people's lives.
- A high level of self-doubt

When kept in balance and alternated with other behavior, none of these styles dooms you to the status of 'preferred target' of an emotional blackmailer. Emotional blackmailing takes training and practice. *Emotional blackmailers take their cues from our responses to their testing, and they learn from both what we do and what we don't do.*

The Impact of Blackmail

Emotional blackmail may not be life threatening but it robs us of our integrity. Integrity is that place inside where our values and our moral compass reside, clarifying what right and wrong for us.

- We let ourselves down.
- A vicious cycle ensues.
- Rationalizing and justifying.
- We may betray others to placate the blackmailer.
- It sucks the safety out of the relationship.
- We may shut down and constrict emotional generosity.

The impact on our well-being:

- Mental health
- Physical pain as a warning

Part 2: Turning Understanding into Action

To change, we need to know what we have to do and then we have to act. If you're willing to take action now and let your feelings of confidence and competence catch up with you, you can end emotional blackmail.

What is Necessary to Stop Emotional Blackmail

- The victim must begin to look at the situation in a new way.
- They must detach from their emotions.
- They must realize that they are being blackmailed and that it is not appropriate for the blackmailer to be treating them in that manner.

- They must make a commitment to themselves that they will take care of themselves and no longer allow this abusive treatment.
- They need to see that a demand is being made on them and that it makes them uncomfortable.
- They must determine why the demand feels uncomfortable.
- They must not give into the pressure for an immediate decision.
- They must set boundaries to be able to take time to consider the situation and to look at all of the alternatives to make the decision.
- Finally, they must consider their own needs first for a change, in this process.

How to Respond to Emotional Blackmailers

Below are some specific ways to answer the most common types of responses. It can't be emphasized too strongly how important it is to practice saying these statements until they feel natural to you; how to respond to the other person's catastrophic predictions and threats. Punishers and self-punishers may try pressuring you to change your decision by bombarding you with visions of the extreme negative consequences of doing what you've decided to do. It's never easy to resist the fear that their bleak vision will come to pass, especially when the theme they're pounding home is "Bad things will happen - and it'll be your fault." But hold your ground.

| When they say: | Then you say: |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * If you don't take care of me, I'll wind up in the hospital/on the street/unable to work. * You'll never see your kids again. * You'll destroy this family. * You're not my child anymore. * I'm cutting you out of my will. * I'll get sick. * I can't make it without you. * I'll make you suffer. * You'll be sorry. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * That's your choice. * I hope you won't do that, but I've made my decision. * I know you're very angry right now. When you've had a chance to think about this, maybe you'll change your mind. * Why don't we talk about this again when you're less upset? Threats/suffering/tears aren't going to work anymore. * I'm sorry you're upset. |

| When they say: | Then you say: |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
|-----------------------|----------------------|

| | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * I can't believe you're being so selfish. This isn't like you. You're only thinking of yourself. You never think about my feelings. * I really thought you were different from the other women/men I've been with. I guess I was wrong. * That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard. * Everyone knows that children are supposed to respect their parents. * How can you be so disloyal? * You're just being an idiot. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * You're entitled to your opinion. * I'm sure that's how it looks to you. * That could be. * You may be right. * I need to think about this more. * We'll never get anywhere if you keep insulting me. * I'm sorry you're upset. |
|---|--|

| When they say: | Then you say: |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * How could you do this to me (after all I've done for you)? * Why are you ruining my life? * Why are you being so stubborn/obstinate/selfish? * What's come over you? * Why are you acting like this? * Why do you want to hurt me? * Why are you making such a big deal out of this? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * I knew you wouldn't be happy about this, but that's the way it has to be. * There are no villains here. We just want different things. * I'm not willing to take more than 50 percent of the responsibility. * I know how upset/angry/disappointed you are, but it's not negotiable. * We see things differently. * I'm sure you see it that way. * I'm sorry you're upset. |

Handling Silence

But what about the person who blackmails through anger that is expressed covertly through sulks and suffering? When they say nothing, what can you say or do? For many targets, this silent anger is far more maddening and crazy than an overt attack. Sometimes it seems as if nothing works with this kind of blackmailer, and sometimes nothing does. But you'll have the most success if you stick to the principles of non-defensive communication and stay conscious of the following do's and don'ts.

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>In dealing with silent blackmailers, DON'T:</p> | <p>DO use the following techniques:</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Expect them to make the first step toward resolving the conflict. * Plead with them to tell you what's wrong. * Keep after them for a response (which will only make them withdraw more). * Criticize, analyze or interpret their motives, character or inability to be direct. * Willingly accept blame for whatever they're upset about to get them into a better mood. * Allow them to change the Subject. * Get intimidated by the tension and anger in the air. * Let your frustration cause you to make threats you really don't mean (e.g., "If you don't tell me what's wrong, I'll never speak to you again"). * Assume that if they ultimately apologize, it will be followed by any significant change in their behavior. * Expect major personality changes, even if they recognize what they're doing and are willing to work on it. Remember: Behavior can change. Personality styles usually don't. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Remember that you are dealing with people who feel inadequate and powerless and who are afraid of your ability to hurt or abandon them. * Confront them when they're more able to hear what you have to say. Consider writing a letter. It may feel less threatening to them. * Reassure them that they can tell you what they're angry about and you will hear them out without retaliating. * Use tact and diplomacy. This will reassure them that you won't exploit their vulnerabilities and bludgeon them with recriminations. * Say reassuring things like "I know you're angry right now, and I'll be willing to discuss this with you as soon as you're ready to talk about it," Then leave them alone. You'll only make them withdraw more if you don't. * Don't be afraid to tell them that their behavior is upsetting to you, but begin by expressing appreciation. For example: "Dad, I really care about you, and I think you're one of the smartest people I know, but it really bothers me when you clam up every time we disagree about something and just walk away is hurting our relationship, and I wonder if you would talk to me about that." * Stay focused on the issue you're upset about. * Expect to be attacked when you express a grievance, because they experience your assertion as an attack on them as an attack on them. * Let them know that you know they're angry |

and what you're willing to do about it. For example: "I'm sorry you 're upset because I don't want your folks to stay with us when they're in town, but I'm certainly willing to take the time to find a nice hotel for them and maybe pay for part of their vacation."

- * Accept the fact that you will have to make the first move most, if not all, of the time.
- * Let some things slide

These techniques are the only ones that have a chance to interrupt the pattern that's so typical of a silent, angry blackmailer, the cycle that goes "Look how upset I am, and it's all your fault. Now figure out what you did wrong and how you're going to make it up to me." I know how infuriating it is to have to be the rational one when you feel like strangling the other person, but it's the only way I know to create an atmosphere that will allow change to take place. Your hardest job will be to stay non defensive and to convince the quietly angry person that it's OK for them to be angry when they've spent a lifetime believing just the opposite.

(This review is based on the book: "Emotional Blackmail" by Susan Forward, Ph.D. The author is an internationally acclaimed therapist, lecturer, and author.)

Hatred Can Eat Your Spirit Alive

So Forgive But How?

Forgiveness is about letting go of hate.

It is so difficult to remember that forgiving is something you do for your *own* sake. It is *not* a gift to an undeserving foe. Forgiveness is *not* approval. It is not your way of saying, "Oh, never mind. It doesn't really matter." Forgiveness does not mean that what the other person did was acceptable or even tolerable. Quite the contrary: Forgiveness says, "What you did hurt me deeply and you were wrong to do it. I have hated you for what you did long enough. Now I want to let go of my hatred. I forgive you."

Forgiveness is not forgetting. The idea that you would forget a life event of such significance, one that evoked such pain, is naive. *Forgiveness is remembering, but remembering without rage.* To some degree, time heals. But if the battle never quits, and if you can't remove yourself from the person who hurt you, you will have an even harder time forgiving. However, when you are no longer coping with the person, you will have less motivation to forgive.

You have the most reason to work on forgiveness with people who must remain a part of your life — but they are the hardest to forgive, because each new interaction threatens the possibility of a new insult sometimes on a daily basis. Now you have fresh reasons to be enraged.

If the person is a part of your present life, call a cease-fire. This might mean telling the person directly that you believe the two of you shouldn't meet for a specific period of time. That's right. You call your ex, your father, your mother, your stepson or your friend and you say, "There is so much anger between us that I think we need to take a break. Let's not meet or talk for six months [or whatever time period feels right], and then we can talk and see if we can work things out better."

Or when your husband leaves you for a new love, and the two of them have dinner frequently at your preferred social spots, take an extended vacation from these places. Heal in private, and search your heart for a way to forgive away from the injury.

In some ongoing battles, two persons pass their poison through a third. An in-law battle might be waged only by dumping on or ripping apart the person to whom you are both related.

Whichever mode of expression you use to vent your hatred, whether third-

person or direct assault, a cease-fire would be simple: You've said it all before. Don't say it anymore. For some predetermined period of time, don't vent your anger. Don't confide your feelings if solicited. Don't communicate them if provoked. Keep silent, because silence is a step to a cease-fire. And a cease-fire is a step toward forgiveness.

Forgiveness is a complicated, difficult task. But even if you know how to forgive, there is no certainty that you will do it. First, you'd need to overcome the payoffs of anger: Anger helps you to punish wrongdoers, and protects you from facing other, more difficult emotions like guilt, so (consciously or unconsciously) you fear that if you let go of anger, you'd have to deal with these underlying issues. But you also have other reasons not to forgive:

1. You fear that if you forgive, the other person will take advantage. Sometimes it seems as if only anger makes you strong enough to fight. You may think, *"Give an inch and she'll run over you like a steamroller."*
2. Since rage is part of how you punish those who hurt you, forgiveness feels as if you're letting someone off the hook: *"If I forgive, he gets away with what he did."* But the problem is, sometimes you stay angry forever. That means you punish forever — which is usually out of proportion to the crime.

Besides, your rage is a relatively ineffective punishment. You usually keep it to yourself, or share it with people you feel good about. But even if you do vent it from time to time at the person with whom you are angry, the whole outburst lasts only seconds or minutes. But you are punishing yourself with the anger by living with it for days, months or even years.

Yes, you are the one most punished by your anger, because you are the one who experiences it most intensely. When you are able to forgive, the person you let off the hook is yourself.

Often anger is the inevitable by-product of a bitter power struggle. The first person who blinks loses. To forgive is to blink: *"If I forgive, it means I'm weak."*

Forgiveness is not weakness, but it is a way to bow out of the battle. Bickering is usually a struggle for dominance. So you can make a conscious decision: Is it important for me to struggle for dominance in this relationship? If the answer is yes, bicker away until you can find a more satisfactory way to work it out. But if the victory is not as important to you as it once was, don't take the angry route. Forgive instead.

The five steps to closure and reconciliation.

- 1. First of all, you have to acknowledge to yourself how deeply you've been hurt.**
- 2. Next, you have to admit you feel hatred.** You can't struggle to forgive unless you admit how malignant the feeling is that you're holding inside. You are not mad, irritated, annoyed or any of the other acceptable forms of anger. The form of anger you feel is hatred and hatred can eat your spirit alive. Hatred is what you let go of when you forgive.
- 3. You will also have to see what is happening through different eyes.** This is the most difficult step in forgiveness. It is utterly necessary that you think about the events from another point of view. Yes, you were deeply hurt. But it does not necessarily follow that the person actually intended to hurt you. This shift of focus is critical for your healing.
- 4. You might need to get an idea of how you contributed to the miserable outcome over which you are now suffering so deeply.** This does not mean that whatever occurred was your fault. Whatever occurred was probably less a question of fault than of two persons' acting according to their own conflicting needs, or of one person's acting out of a weakness that deeply intruded on the other.
- 5. Finally, you try for closure and reconciliation.** The last step in forgiving is to communicate your anger, your hatred, your pain and your forgiveness to the person who hurt you. Then you take him or her back into your life, and close the circle broken by rage.

This step is not always possible because the other person is not willing to hear you, or because he or she is still unwilling to be responsible for hurting you in the first place. The point is not for you to accept a blame that your wrongdoer wishes to pass on to you. The point is for you to say you were hurt and enraged over this hurt, and for him to be able to acknowledge that yes, he did hurt you — whether deliberately, inadvertently or unconsciously. After he has acknowledged that he hurt you deeply, then you let him know that you forgive him, and you build a new relationship from there.

This final step in forgiveness depends largely on the other person's capacity to hear the truth, and to be responsible for his actions. If he hasn't matured to the point where he is capable of this level of self-awareness, don't let it stand in your way. Remember, the purpose of forgiveness is to free yourself from the pain and poison of rage. It is true that forgiveness is easier if your persecutor can acknowledge and be responsible for the injury he caused.

Give him the opportunity to do so. If he can't or won't take it, let it go.

The real-life complication comes because, most often, the two of you have hurt each other. It's quite possible that the person toward whom you carry such rage carries every bit as much toward you. Then you have a double duty: You have to forgive how you were hurt, and you have to acknowledge how much hurt you inflicted.

by Judith Sills, Ph.D.

Fear Of Forgiving

If we long to receive mercy, why is it so painful to give it?

- Allen C. Guelzo

If one of the sweetest words in the Bible is *forgiveness*, why do many people find it so bitter?

The answer is plain, brief, and painful: The kind of forgiveness we love to sing about is not the only forgiveness that matters. We are called to another forgiveness that often tastes bitter, the kind that flows from us to other people.

God forgives us: but then he obliges us to forgive others.

When forgiveness is hard work

Not only are we told to forgive anyone who has provoked us; we also learn we cannot enjoy forgiveness ourselves if we are not exercising it toward others.

But consider a second reason why we should forgive: *When we refuse to do so, we in effect try to keep God from forgiving someone else. When we withhold forgiveness, we are really saying that the person who has offended us is no proper object of God's forgiveness. After all, if that person is not worthy of our forgiveness, how could he or she possibly merit God's forgiveness?*

Or worse, we say (in effect) that the other person is no person at all, but subhuman. Persons can be forgiven; but if the object of our hatred or mistrust is not worth the trouble of forgiveness, then what-else can that mean but that they are not persons? In that case, we not only "kill" another person, we kill a little bit of ourselves, too. By withholding forgiveness, we deprive another person of what could lead to wholeness and healing and we deprive ourselves of the inner healing and wholeness that could come from being part of that renewal.

And yet, despite all these seemingly obvious reasons why people need to be forgivers, the secret truth for many people is that we find it infinitely easier to be forgiven by God than to forgive others. The reasons for that cold reluctance are as varied as people themselves. There are people who were hurt years ago by the breakup of their parents' marriages, and hurt is buried so deep, or festers so close to the surface, that they see no way to forgive. There are people who have been wronged on the job or who have been gossiped about in the community. And all of them together think, "I cannot, just cannot find it in me to forgive them."

We struggle to extend forgiveness because the wrongs done to us by others hurt so much. At the same time, we are not completely sure what forgiveness really is or what it might involve. It is not that we cannot forgive someone, but that we are afraid of what it might cost.

Throwing away resentment

What, exactly, does God expect us to do in response to his words to forgive if we have anything against anyone?

Three Greek Words are usually translated as forgive. One speaks about having an attitude of mercy or love being tender hearted and forgiving one another. Another word describes the cancellation of an obligation (forgive and you will be forgiven). The most common word for forgiveness literally

means to release, to hurl away, to free yourself from something. It is this aspect of forgiveness that involves putting aside one's selfish will in order to be free of the entrapments or cancerous effects of unforgiveness.

To forgive means to willingly throw away our resentment at being wrong. This entails not just containing or restraining our resentment, but letting go of it entirely so we can be truly free of its influence.

Resentment is a feeling of displeasure and indignation from a sense of being injured or offended.

Indignant is a feeling or expressing of anger or scorn especially at unjust, mean, or ungrateful action or treatment.

This approach, however, may strike us as phony and sanctimonious, as if we are expected to greet every piece of rottenness dished out to us with a saintly smile and an understanding, "There, there, you didn't mean that, did you?" Because we fear that this is exactly what forgiveness means, we find it unpalatable. We are willing enough to suffer for our well being or inner peace but there is something in us that does not want merely to be exploited, even for righteousness' sake.

Neither pardon nor excuse

Fortunately, forgiveness means more than just rolling over and playing dead. There are a few things that forgiveness is not, and these may balance the picture. *Forgiveness does not mean pardon.* Forgiveness is personal: it refers to the impact an offense has on you and your need to release the resentment you feel. Pardon is legal rather than personal, concerned only with the legal status of the offense, not the relationship between offender and victim. And pardon unlike forgiveness, means letting someone off the moral hook and releasing them from punishment they deserve.

It is possible to have pardon without forgiveness—a murderer can be pardoned by the governor, but that does not mean the victim's family has forgiven him. And there can be forgiveness without pardon. In 1986, Michael Saward, a well-known city resident, answered the door of his London house. The three men who stood in his doorway pounded Saward over the head with a cricket bat, fracturing his skull. Then they broke into his house, raped Saward's daughter and beat up her boyfriend. The three were quickly arrested, and in a television interview shortly afterward, a badly battered Saward touched the British nation by publicly forgiving his assailant. But when the men were sentenced to prison terms of 3-5 years, Saward frankly criticized the sentences as too lenient. Saward had forgiven them, but that did not mean he wanted them automatically pardoned for their crime.

A second thing forgiveness does not mean is excuse. When we excuse someone, we suggest that if we could only understand how a person's actions were shaped or motivated by environment or genetic makeup, we would see that he or she had no alternative. And it is true that understanding someone's difficulties or shortcomings can help us forgive. *But understanding is not the same as forgiving, because all the difficulties and shortcomings in the world do not negate the fact that fully conscious offenders remain responsible for what they do.* To suggest otherwise we cannot be responsible for our obedience, either.

Forgiveness cannot be watered down to mere "understanding". People cannot be trivialized into machines, and forgiveness cannot be civilized into excuse. C. S. Lewis wrote,

There is all the difference in the world between forgiving and excusing. Forgiveness says: "Yes, you have done this thing, but I accept your apology. I will never hold it against you and everything between us will be exactly as it was before." But excusing says: "I see that you couldn't help it, or didn't mean it. You weren't really to blame." If one was not really to blame, then there is nothing to forgive. In that sense forgiveness and excusing are almost opposites.

If this is true, we need not be afraid that in practicing forgiveness we are somehow tolerating wrong or condoning evil. Forgiveness does not mean "ceasing to blame" but rather, "letting go of resentment" Lewis once again, says it all:

Real forgiveness means looking steadily at the [offense], the [offense] that is left over without any excuse, after all allowances have been made, and seeing it that in all its horror, dirt, meanness and malice, and nevertheless being wholly reconciled to the man who has done it.

Practicing forgiveness

Once we understand what forgiveness is, how do we put it into practice? Many of us have trouble forgiving others because we fail to understand what forgiveness means, or because we confuse forgiveness with something it is not. But for others, forgiveness is frightening because we misunderstand the process of forgiving, or we fear that practicing forgiveness will hurt more than receiving the original offense.

Ethicist Lewis Smedes identifies four stages in the process of forgiveness:

1. **The first occurs at the point of our hurt.** We have been injured in some way, spiritually, emotionally, or materially, and we feel the injury.
2. **Second, we hate.** The injury we feel boils into an active resentment of the person who committed the injury. And this, too, is a natural response. So we experience resentment or actual hatred.
3. **Third, we heal.** At this point, we finally let go; it is the critical moment of forgiveness. And, unlike hurting and hating, it is anything but natural. To let go of hatred means we need a strength to operate on us that will work entirely in the opposite direction of our hurting and hating.

Perhaps *moment* is the wrong word to use here. The healing of forgiveness can sometimes occur in one immense rush of relief and compassion. But more often it takes much longer. Forgiveness looms as a goal to be worked toward rather than a prize to be grasped; and it is something on which we may repeatedly lose or gain ground. It is possible to achieve a spiritual attitude resembling forgiveness toward someone and wake up the next week with the old hate burning as hotly as ever and the whole work needing to begin all over again. Wisdom may lie less in expecting forgiveness to occur as a spiritual drama and more in spending time in prayer over our hurt, in patiently pushing aside its incessant demand for attention, and in watching it shrink slowly and fitfully into remission.

4. Finally, as we heal, we must then forget. This does not imply some kind of sentimental amnesia. Nor is it really possible simply by the force of will literally to "forgive and forget." Rather, forgetting means we no longer allow our past resentments to be the judge of the trespasser. The way we do that will vary with the trespassers themselves.

We have to be prepared for trespassers who either do not think they need forgiveness or who do not really care whether you or anyone else forgives them for anything. We need to make a distinction here: In the case of someone who shows no desire for our forgiveness, forgiveness means we stop thinking up ways to hurt them. But then there are cases where our act of forgetting does become a catalyst for change and repentance in the other person. By our unnatural act of letting go and not seeking personal revenge, we may surprise an offender into another unnatural act: reflecting on their offenses.

In that case, when someone seeks forgiveness and confesses his or her shame to us, forgetting must take the form of trust, because trust is the most compelling evidence of forgiveness. Trust is exactly the evidence that God shows us concerning our own experience of forgiveness.

Reducing forgiveness to a prescription runs the risk of making it sound easy, of course. It is not: the power to forgive must ultimately come from God. But at the same time, it must be pursued.

If we want to know what the forgiveness of our offenses really means and what it really cost, then we will know those things only as we forgive. And only then will we begin to sample the full sweetness of the word forgiveness.

Step Aside

*You cannot protect anyone from themselves;
you cannot protect anyone from life.*

*You cannot spare a loved one the confrontation
with their own mortality,
their own stupidity or their own emptiness.*

*Indeed, to take on the burden of sentry,
guarding another person's borders,
is to interfere with that person's life lesson.*

*If we are the sum of
everything that happens to us,
to limit a person's experience
is to limit their growth.*

Dr. David Viscott