

Forgiveness

CASEL Core Competencies: Relationship skills, self-awareness, social awareness

State Health Standards: Standard 4, Standard 5, Standard 6

Learner/Participant Objectives: Self-efficacy (personal boundaries/assertiveness, gender norms)

Content Warnings: Racism, physical abuse, mental abuse

Facilitator Tips: Try looking for recent examples of forgiveness in familiar local news or popular culture. This helps youth put the content and themes into perspective. Consider exploring the idea of forgiveness to also forgiving oneself. For participants who may have experienced trauma, this can avoid suggesting that healing/letting go of anger is contingent on forgiving someone who harmed them.

Key Terms: Forgiveness, Empathy

Time: 30 – 45 Minutes

Materials needed: White Board or Large Paper, Paper, Writing Utensils

Background: Forgiveness is letting go of any anger or resentment that you may feel towards another person who has inflicted harm. Forgiving someone, no matter how big or small the situation, requires compassion, empathy, and strength. Recognizing the power of forgiveness can help young people build strong relationships both within and outside their household.

Discussion Questions

- What does it mean to forgive someone?
- What can forgiveness look like?

Procedure

- Begin today's activity by exploring the meaning of forgiveness with your group. Record their responses in a visible location.
- Explain that forgiveness is letting go of any anger and resentment that you may feel towards another person. You may forgive someone for something minor like bumping into you or taking your seat. Or you may forgive someone for not including you during a game at recess or forgetting to call you on your birthday. You may also forgive someone for something more serious such as ending a romantic relationship or physically hurting you or someone in your family. Forgiveness is not easy, and it may take a significant amount of time to achieve.

- Discuss current events and examples of forgiveness. You may also share powerful moments of forgiveness in history such as:
 - Elizabeth Eckford was a 15-year-old African American student who attended Little Rock High School in Arkansas in 1957. She is known as one of the Little Rock Nine because she is one of the nine young African American students who went to the all-white high school after the Brown vs. Board of education decision in 1954. This law made segregation, or separation, of black and white people illegal in education; before this, black children and white children could not attend the same school. Many white students were not supportive of this decision and did not treat the black students as equals. On her very first day of high school, Elizabeth had to walk through a mob of white students and adults who were yelling and threatening to hurt her. She was brave but very afraid. During her time at Little Rock High, Elizabeth was threatened and harassed and even had to have the National Guard come to protect her and the other black students.

Elizabeth suffered from nightmares and paranoia for a long time because of her experience at Little Rock High. There is a famous picture of Elizabeth walking to school bravely while the mob follows her. Thirty four years after the picture was taken, Hazel Massery, one of the white women shown in the picture yelling, apologized to Elizabeth.

- Tariq Khamisa was 20 years old when he was killed while delivering a pizza. His assailant was 14-year-old Tony Hicks who shot him on orders from an 18-year-old gang leader. After his son's murder, Tariq's dad, Azim Khamisa, didn't seek revenge, but saw two children lost, one forever and one to the state prison system. Azim established the Tariq Khamisa Foundation (TKF) to honor his son and to "stop kids from killing kids." He reached out to Ples Felix, Tony Hicks' grandfather and guardian. Together, they have spoken to thousands of children about the "power of forgiveness" to break the cycle of youth violence. Tony Hicks pleaded guilty to murder in 1996 and delivered a remorseful speech at his sentencing, accepting responsibility for his actions and asking for Tariq's dad's forgiveness. Tony was sentenced to prison for 25 years to life. The foundation continues to change the lives of young people by empowering them to make positive nonviolent choices (TKF).
- Lead a discussion on what Participants would have done in each of the two situations above. Could they have forgiven the person? Why or why not? There is no right or wrong answer!
 - Now shift the discussion and ask Participants:
 - Why might you want to forgive someone? (Ex: they asked for forgiveness; they said they were sorry; they made it up to me; I wanted to let go of my own anger; I was over it; it made me feel good to forgive them)

- Why might you want someone to forgive you? (Ex: you know what you did hurt them; you said you were sorry; you have changed)
 - Who benefits from forgiveness? (If it is genuine, everyone!)
 - Can you recall a situation where you forgave someone in the past? What happened and how did that feel?
- To end the session, ask Participants to think about anyone in their life that they currently want to forgive or ask for forgiveness. Invite them to take a few minutes to write that person a letter. This is private and should not be shared with the group.