

# Exercises for Cultivating Self-Forgiveness

## Understanding the forces impacting upon you that caused you to harm.

1. Write a list of the people you have harmed and the ways you have harmed them.
2. One by one, go through your list and write down the various causes and conditions that led you to this action or inaction.
3. See if there are any connections between your harmful actions and the fact that you were abused or neglected.
4. Now think of other precipitating factors such as a family history of violence and a family history of addiction, as well as more subtle factors such as stress due to financial problems or marital problems.
5. Now ask yourself to consider why you didn't stop yourself from harming this person. For example, were you so full of rage that you couldn't control yourself? Did you hate yourself so much that you didn't care how much you hurt someone else? Had you built up such a defensive wall that you couldn't have empathy or compassion for the person you harmed?

## Making Apologies

Spend some time thinking seriously about how your actions or inaction have harmed the person.

Completing the following sentence may help in this process:

“I harmed \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_.”

Write down all the ways your action or inaction harmed this person.

“I caused \_\_\_\_\_ to suffer in the following ways \_\_\_\_\_.”

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A meaningful apology is one that communicates the three R's: *regret*, *responsibility*, and *remedy*.

1. A statement of regret for having caused the inconvenience, hurt, or damage. This includes an expression of empathy toward the other person showing that you understand how your action or inaction harmed him or her.
2. An acceptance of responsibility for your actions. For an apology to be effective it must be clear that you are accepting total responsibility for your actions or inaction. This means not blaming anyone else for what you did and not making excuses for your actions.
3. A statement of your willingness to take some action to remedy the situation. While you can't go back and undo or redo the past, you can do everything within your power to repair the harm you caused. Therefore, a meaningful apology needs to include a statement in which you offer restitution in some way, an offer to help the other person, or a promise to take action so that you will not repeat the behavior. In the case of emotional or physical abuse, you can enter therapy or a support group to make sure you do not abuse anyone again. You can offer to pay for your victim's therapy or you can donate your time or money to organizations that work to help victims of abuse.

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