

Question: *“As I bring more awareness to my own needs and feelings with firm loving boundaries, and in so doing, establishing Right Relationship to the needs of my child, I notice that a space opens for compassion and forgiveness, for myself but also for those that harmed me as a child. My question then is, what is “Right Relationship” with those who harmed us as children? Does this not require forgiveness (with loving boundaries?) This is where I get confused, as I looked to establish a “Right Relationship” with my father before he died and as I am now trying to establish with my mother and ex-partner.”*

Answer: The first thing to explore is what is meant by the word “forgiveness.” All too often this means excusing someone else’s bad choices and bad behavior.

Instead, it means healing splits within ourselves, reconciling with parts of ourselves in a process of inner compassion - which includes correction of what caused the wrong choice in the first place. Forgiveness requires compassion for the inner emotional/physical experiences and it also means firm inner limits, discipline and surrender to a higher state of consciousness. Forgiveness is not something we do for someone else, it is a long process of inner work in healing. Once we are internally reconciled, healed and whole again, then we bear not revenge in our hearts but see clearly the dynamic within the other that caused the perpetration. Then we will be able to be in Right Relationship with the other. We will no longer turn a blind eye or enact revenge. We will relate from a place of firm, but loving boundary and deep compassion.

So, for instance, if as a child you were emotionally abused you will have felt shame. This shame is created by the child’s inaccurate and untrue belief that the abuse meant they were somehow wrong, bad and imperfect. (Even if you were not abused, the simple experience of not knowing how to in the world, creates the same shame and belief in a child.) Now as an adult, while we can certainly feel the shame, the correction of the belief system and all behaviors ensuing from such a belief system must be disciplined, corrected, challenged and transformed to something like:

Yes, you felt shame when Mom/Dad said or did However, it does not mean you are bad and wrong and imperfect. That belief is incorrect. Whatever you did or said, was a learning opportunity for you, not an excuse abuse you.

When you can feel the shame and correct the belief and change the behavior internally, you will automatically have the same response to anyone that is abusing you in the present, both with yourself and in your communication with the other person.

Perpetrators will typically deny, minimize, rationalize, justify and blame as defense against the inner shame they are feeling for behaving the way they do. These defenses are then instilled/introjected into the child who will then deny, minimize, rationalize, justify the abuse and blame themselves. The perpetration is now internalized and acted out internally and externally with all future perpetrators - until awareness is brought to the situation and the childish beliefs corrected.

The work of forgiveness is an inner process of healing and learning to set limits with love instead of what we got - no limits and indulgence, or shaming limits and abuse. The internal work is the work of both/and, in love, instead of either/or from unaware shame and fear.