

Forgiveness can feel like a loaded topic and stirs up many strong feelings. Deciding on the role it has in your life can be a journey. It can make a difference whether the motivation to forgive comes from you or others. Some men maybe told they need to forgive the person who sexually abused them. Some men may be told they should never forgive. Some will be tempted to judge others on what they say or do around forgiveness.

The decision to forgive or not forgive can be straight forward for some but complex for others. Importantly it is your choice on whether to forgive and how you carry out that decision. How you approach this personal matter is likely informed by cultural attitudes, the opinions of those close to you, your experiences and outlook.

The opportunity to come to your own understanding about forgiveness can be experienced as personal power or a release of pressure. Pressure coming from others about forgiveness can be experienced as an obligation, a burden, or even oppressive.

The experiences of some men and the influences of the different ideas about forgiveness are described below.

In discussion you could reflect on these or give other examples. If you feel you have made a firm decision you may like to name what influenced that decision.

Forgiveness as essential?

Some cultures and religions promote forgiveness as a something that must be given to those who have wronged us. In this view if we feel unable to forgive then we may be judged as lacking or a failure. Some men may experience this view as an intense pressure and an obligation to others. Forgiveness can feel like a struggle or a burden under these circumstances. Some men value the guidance of their religion or culture and find it important to forgive and they experience a sense of resolution after arriving at the decision.

Forgiveness as a decision?

Some decide to forgive after time and a thoughtful consideration. They make the distinction between seeing the act as unforgiveable, but they forgive the person.

“Another thing that happened when I decided to forgive was that I was no longer tied up in knots thinking about revenge – being furious all the time.”

Not forgiving?

Men can be clear they will never forgive. They consider that forgiving discounts the injustice of what was done and denies the significance of the hurt.

“Strangely, once I was clear I wouldn’t forgive, I felt more secure in myself and less caught up in it all. It was like I was refusing to stay haunted - preoccupied”.

To arrive at the decision about forgiveness through self-realisation (self-discovery, spiritual awareness) is often felt as empowering whereas a decision based on obligation (requirement, ideological requirement) can be experienced as a sense of powerlessness. One man’s description of his struggle and realisation was:

“The hardest thing I found was the belief I need to forgive myself - when what I needed was self-compassion”. It was a journey of realising that at my age, and with my resources and wisdom I did all I could and more than could have been reasonably expected of me. That was self-compassion I deserved”.

Discussion:

As you consider your responses and thoughts on what you have read and maybe what is reflected in that comment from a group participant, you may want to share your experience with forgiveness and the various influences on your view.

