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MOTIVATED

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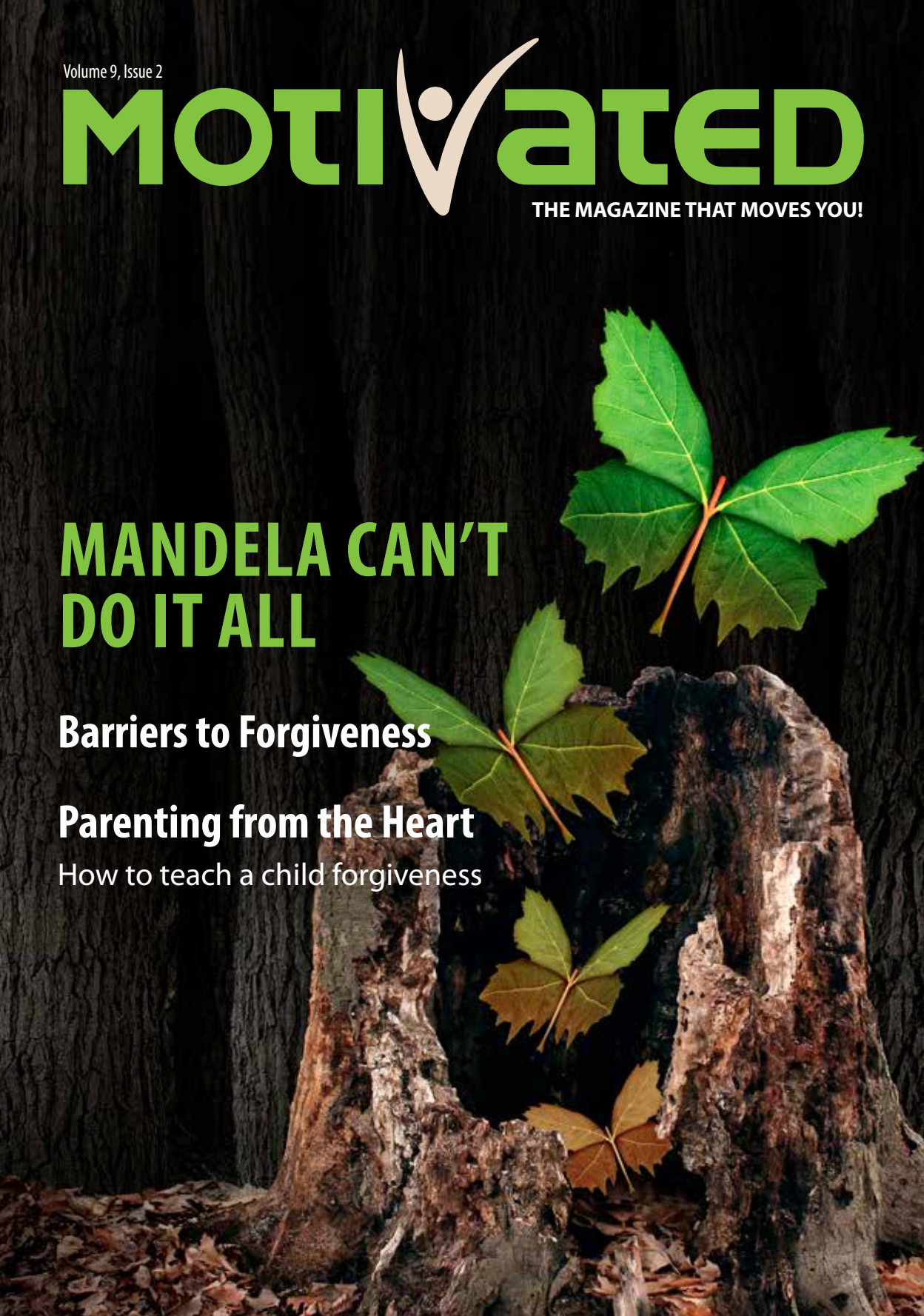

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FROM THE EDITOR

Something happened recently that made me think about forgiveness. I communicated something to someone that had been going on for a while, and which had hurt me. I tried to explain my feelings clearly, and tried to communicate kindly. It wasn't well received. The other person disagreed and felt hurt by what I'd shared.

I felt bad afterwards, and wondered if I should have just let it pass. Not only did it result in hurt feelings on both sides, and a breakdown in communication, but it also brought back many painful memories—memories of incidents and events I thought I had forgiven and moved on from. I ended up second-guessing my decision to speak up, and the few close friends I confided in had conflicting opinions.

I know I am not the only one going through situations like this. Things happen in relationships. Sometimes there are irresolvable differences that lead to separation or divorce, a falling-out between friends or family members, or a distancing between close co-workers. It is not easy to forgive, navigate, or restore broken relationships, and there are many facets to consider.

In my case, I decided I needed a refresher course and review on forgiving past hurts, and knowing how to deal with current issues. The stories and articles I found and read gave me further insight in the complex dynamics of forgiveness, and showed me ways to improve. I hope that sharing what I found will be helpful, and that this issue of *Motivated* will provide the tips and inspiration you may need to forgive both yourself and others.

Christina Lane
For *Motivated*

Mandela Can't Do It All

By Andrew Purchase, adapted

I am South African. Nelson Mandela was also South African. Since his death, there has been a lot of emotion poured out by my countrymen. People wept. Eulogies flowed. Facebook grieved. Flags hung limply at half-mast. Everyone referred to him by using his intimate family names—Madiba and Tata. It felt like everyone in South Africa had lost a relative. World leaders paid homage. The man-in-the-street gave honor.

What's not to pay tribute to? Jailed for 27 years in a tiny cell. Sentenced to hard labor in Robben Island prison quarry. Tortured by racists for being anti-racist. And then to be released and actively promote love for the enemy, all the while selflessly handing over power to a successor.

He disarmed everybody—literally. He charmed everybody—universally. He loved everybody—equally. He unified everybody—charismatically.

His aim was to liberate both the oppressor and the oppressed. "For to be free," he famously said, "is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others."

He was the Leading Light of Forgiveness. "No one is born hating another person," he said. "People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love."

Forgiveness is the ability to treat an unworthy person as if they were altogether worthy. It is the planet's most urgent need, for we all require it.

Mourn the great man by all means. But why not also mourn the ways we do not forgive? We are in contradiction if we mourn the one but not the other.

We don't have to be sentenced to hard labor on Robben Island to get an opportunity to forgive. We just need a boss, a spouse, a friend, a fellow train commuter, members of another race group in our community, or 20 minutes in rush hour.

If we think we are superior, we'll never forgive anyone. Mandela thought the interests of others were superior to his own. It promoted a unique brand of kindness. The problem is not that we can't be kind; it's that we think we are superior and therefore have no need to be kind.

Opportunities for forgiveness are rife. They accost us every day.

Sometimes I think people deify a hero in exchange for not having to act like the hero. It's a transaction to ease the conscience. And heroes aren't determined by the size of the audience. They are determined by the quality of their actions.

We can forgive those who injure us.

It's just the sort of thing Mandela would do. ■

Barriers to Forgiveness

By Linda Graham, adapted

It's hard to let go of the suffering caused by someone else's wrongdoing. What barriers stand in the way of forgiveness?—And how can we overcome them?

Laurie and Jamie sat in my office a few months ago, locked in an impasse all too common in couple's therapy. The previous week, Laurie discovered that Jamie had done the seemingly unforgivable: He had had a brief fling with the new administrative assistant in his office while Laurie was out of town visiting her ailing father. Jamie was genuinely remorseful, but he also carried a grudge of his own about Laurie's repeated overspending on their credit card, despite his many requests to stay within their agreed upon budget.

We all know how painful it feels to suffer these kinds of hurts, betrayals, or abuse—and to have this pain harden into lasting grudges or resentments. I've spent 20 years helping couples like Laurie and Jamie recover a sense of trust after they have violated their vows, or broken their agreements. In that time, I've found that helping people understand each other's underlying motivations is crucial to repairing a rupture between them.

But I've also learned that helping people forgive each other is essential, even when there is good reason to resist. Indeed, study after study has suggested that being unable to forgive these past wrongs can wreak havoc on our mental and physical health.

Forgiveness is the practice of letting go of the suffering caused by someone else's wrongdoing (or even our own). It does not mean excusing, overlooking, forgetting, condoning, or trivializing the harm, or jumping to a premature or superficial reconciliation; it doesn't necessarily require reconciliation at all. Instead, it involves changing our relationship to an offense through understanding, compassion, and release.

True forgiveness repairs relationships and restores inner well-being.

Yet we often find it hard to let go, forgive, and move on. Why is something so good for us so hard to do?

Traditionally, ideas for helping one person to forgive another have implied either expanding one's empathy or compassion for the offender, or "distancing," not taking things so personally. But research on forgiveness aversion suggests another approach: Forgiveness comes not necessarily by appealing to kindness or compassion, but by addressing the victim's fears and concerns.

Below I offer a brief tour of the three barriers to forgiveness, along with ways

to overcome them, drawing on research and my own clinical experience with hundreds of couples and individuals. Understanding these barriers to forgiveness can be very useful to anyone who has ever struggled to forgive—in other words, most of us.

Barrier #1: Unreadiness

The first block is "unreadiness," which can be defined as an inner state of unresolved emotional turmoil that can delay or derail forgiveness. People can feel stuck in a victim loop, ruminating on the wrongs done to them by another person or by life, and be unable to shift their perspective to a larger view to find the meaning, purpose, lessons, and possibilities for change from the events.

People show more reluctance to move toward forgiveness especially when they hold a fear that the offense will be repeated.

The folk wisdom that "time heals all wounds" establishes the importance of not rushing the process. The passage of time is an important factor in helping people get some distance from the initial pain, confusion, and anger; it helps the offender establish a track record of new trustworthy behavior, and helps the victim reframe the severity of the injury in the larger context of the entire relationship.

Over the three months that I worked with Laurie and Jamie, I saw them confront and ultimately overcome the barrier of unreadiness. In taking that much time, Laurie was able to place Jamie's transgression in the context of a 17-year marriage that had already survived even greater challenges than Jamie's one night of out-of-bounds behavior. And over time, Jamie was able to trust the turn-around in Laurie's spending habits, relaxing his vigilance about her every move.

Tips to Overcome Unreadiness

1. Recall the moment of wrongdoing you are struggling to forgive. "Light up the networks" of this memory by evoking a visual image, noticing emotions that arise as your recall this memory, notice where you feel those emotions in your body as contraction, heaviness, churning. Notice your thoughts about yourself and the other person now as you evoke this memory. Let this moment settle in your awareness.

2. Begin to reflect on what the lessons of this moment might be: what could you have done differently? What could the other person have done differently? What would you do differently from now on? When we can turn a regrettable moment into a teachable moment, when we can even find the gift in the mistake, we can open our perspectives again to the possibilities of change, and forgiveness.

Barrier #2: Self-Protection

The second block to forgiveness is "self-protection"—a fear, very often legitimate, that forgiveness will backfire and leave the person offering forgiveness vulnerable to further harm, aggression, violation of boundaries, exploitation, or abuse.

People who have experienced repeatedly harmful behavior, and lack of remorse or apology for that behavior, are most likely to resist forgiving the offending party. In fact, they found that even the strongest motivation to forgive—to maintain a close relationship—can be mitigated by the perceived severity of the offense and/or by a perceived lack of sincere apology or remorse. Refusing to forgive is an attempt to re-calibrate the power or control in the relationship.

One of the hardest decisions people ever face about forgiveness is: Can I get my core needs met in this relationship? Or do I need to give up this relationship to meet my core needs, including needs for safety and trust? The ongoing behavior of the offender is key here. If the hurtful behavior continues, if any sense of wrongdoing is denied, if the impact of the behavior is minimized, if the recipient's sense of self continues to be diminished by another, or trust continues to be broken, or the victim continues to be blamed for the offender's behavior—if someone experiences any or all of these factors, then forgiveness can start to feel like an impossible, if not a stupid, thing to do.

People sometimes have understandable fears that offering forgiveness will be (mis)interpreted by the offender as evidence that they can get away with the same behavior again. People very often need to learn they have the right to set and enforce legitimate boundaries in a relationship. Forgiveness can also involve not being in a relationship with the offender any longer, or changing the rules and power dynamics for continuing the relationship.

Only when Laurie stopped her overspending and came to respect Jamie's limits on their monthly budget could Jamie relax his need for self-protection and offer genuine forgiveness for Laurie's past transgressions. When Laurie could again trust the sincerity of Jamie's remorse and apology over his betrayal, and trust that indeed the behavior would never happen again, she could relax her need for self-protection and forgive.

How to Set Limits

1. Identify one boundary you've been reluctant to set with the person you are struggling to forgive.

2. Clarify in your own mind how setting this limit reflects and serves your own values, needs, and desires. Reflect on your understanding of the values and desires of the other person. Notice any common ground between the two of you; notice the differences.

3. Initiate the conversation about limits with the other person. Begin by expressing your appreciation for him or her listening to you. State the topic; state your understanding of your own needs and of theirs.

4. State the terms of your limit, simply, clearly, unequivocally. You've already stated the values, needs and desires behind the limit; you do not have to justify, explain or defend your position. State the consequences for the relationship if this limit is not respected.

5. Negotiate with the other person what behaviors they can do, by when, to demonstrate that they understand your limit, the need for it, and the benefit of it.

6. At the end of the specified "test" period, discuss with your person the changes in the relationship, if the limit was respected, or the next step in consequences if the limit is not respected. You may have to repeat this exercise many times to shift the dynamics in your relationship.

Barrier #3: "Face" Concerns

The third block is "face" concerns—what we might call the need to save face in front of other people and protect one's own public reputation, as well as avoid threats to one's own self-concept—i.e. feeling that "I'm a pushover" or "I'm a doormat."

As social beings, we're primed to not want to appear weak or vulnerable or pathetic in front of other people. We will protect ourselves from feeling inner shame in many ways, which may

include a reluctance to forgive. Hanging on to a grudge can also give people a sense of control in their relationships; they may fear that forgiveness will cause them to lose this "social power." If our concerns about saving face foster a desire to retaliate or seek vengeance rather than forgive, we may need to re-strengthen our inner sense of self-worth and self-respect before forgiveness can be an option.

People who feel their self-worth has been diminished by the offense, or who experience a threat to their sense of control, belonging, or social reputation, or even feel a need for revenge, are more likely to experience the "face" concerns that could block forgiveness.

Very often people who have been hurt by another need to recover their own sense of self-respect and self-worth to create the mental space where forgiveness looks like a real option. We need to develop and maintain an inner subjective reality—a sense of self—that is independent of other people's negative opinions and expectations of us. Good friends, trusted family members, therapists, or clergy can be very helpful in functioning as a True Other to someone's True Self—they're figures who can help generate a more positive sense of self.

Laurie and Jamie had kept their struggles private from friends or family, so they didn't have strong "face" concerns about social reputations. But they did need to move beyond the shaming-blaming behaviors prevalent when they first came into couple's therapy. They had to work on not taking things so personally, and on feeling appreciated and worthy in each other's eyes again before they could move toward forgiveness.

Forgiveness is not easy. It takes sincere intention and diligent practice over time. But overcoming reluctance, even refusal, to forgive can be facilitated by understanding these specific aversions to forgiveness, and by implementing strategies to address these barriers skillfully. ■

How to See Yourself

1. Sit comfortably, allowing your eyes to gently close. Focus your attention on your breathing.

2. When you're ready, bring to mind someone in your life in whose presence you feel safe. This person could be a dear friend, a therapist, a teacher, a spiritual figure, your own wiser self.

3. Imagine yourself sitting with this person face-to-face. Visualize the person looking at you with acceptance and tenderness, appreciation and delight. Feel yourself taking in his or her love and acceptance of you.

4. Now imagine yourself being the other person, looking at yourself through his or her eyes. Feel that person's love and openness being directed toward you. See in yourself the goodness the other person sees in you. Savor this awareness of your own goodness.

5. Now come back to being yourself. You are in your own body again, experiencing the other person looking at you again, with so much love and acceptance. Notice how and where you feel that love and acceptance in your body—as a smile, as a warmth in your heart—and savor it.

6. Take a moment to reflect on your experience. You are recovering a positive view of your own self again. Set the intention to remember this feeling when you need to.

THE WONDERFUL DAY MY STUDENT FORGAVE ME

By Carole Braverman

I used to teach at a private high school in New England, and in one of my classes, I had a student named Liza.

On the first day of class, when I called her name, I pronounced it Lisa, and she politely corrected me. It was Liza, she said. The next day it happened again. "Lisa?" I called. "Liza," she corrected, "with a Z."

I apologized. But despite the simplicity of the name, the mistake made that first day seemed to have a grip on some irrational part of my brain, and for weeks I got it wrong, at least initially, calling her Lisa, them immediately correcting myself.

The class began to call her Lisa/Liza, but despite the good natured vibes to the joke, I worried that she would think I was deliberately mocking her. I didn't understand it. How hard was it to remember the name Liza? But it had nothing to do with memory or knowledge. The mistake had become unconscious, unchangeable, mysteriously stuck in some delinquent neuron that refused to let it go.

I came to dread the calling of the roll. So it continued with Lisa/Liza until one day I saw her walking alone on campus and caught up with her. "Lisa," I said, then stopped, distressed and beyond apology.

But Liza just flung her arms around me in a hug. "Ms. B," she said, "it doesn't matter. Really. It's fine. You can call me Lisa. Don't worry about it."

From that moment on, I never got her name wrong again. Not once. It was as if the girl's forgiveness had released me from some enchantment, like in a fairy tale. In the annals of the world's giant wrongs, this is a small story, and a minor miracle at best. But I never forgot it, and the generosity at its heart has informed many moments since. ■

HOW TO TEACH A CHILD FORGIVENESS

By Jamie Perillo, LPC

Children are often asked to forgive: forgive his sibling for taking a toy; forgive Johnny for pulling her hair at recess; forgive Mom for being late.

When you ask your child to forgive—to say "okay" when someone has said they are "sorry"—does your child really understand what that means? Did they let go of the issue or are they repeating what you are telling them to say?

It is important for children to understand compassion, loving-kindness, and forgiveness. Teaching your child to forgive is an essential life tool that will make navigating childhood and adolescence easier. Holding on to anger and resentment is a recipe for anxiety and depression for children and adults.

So how do you teach forgiveness?

While there's no sure-fire way to teach your child forgiveness, some of these ideas may help get you started.

1. Forgiving is not forgetting. Children—and many adults—hesitate to forgive because they believe it means condoning the other person's behaviors. There is also a misperception that forgiving means forgetting, which might bring on fear it will happen again. In reality, to forgive is to say, "I did not like or appreciate your words or actions, but I am willing to let it go because it does not help me to hold onto these feelings."

2. In order to forgive sometimes we need to look beyond the action and explore the person. For example, if your child is upset Susie called him or her a name during recess, help your child explore what was happening. Maybe Susie was on the outskirts of the hop-scotch game and wanted to play. Maybe she felt bad she was not invited to play or was jealous of those who were. Helping your child understand a possible trigger for the person's actions encourages compassion and forgiveness.

3. Before asking your child to let go, forgive, or excuse a behavior, it is first important to identify the feeling your child is experiencing. Is he or she angry, embarrassed, or disappointed? He or she needs to understand how the incident made him or her feel before he or she can forgive.

4. State the feeling before offering forgiveness. Instead of asking your child to immediately accept their sibling's "I'm sorry," have them state how they feel. For example, "Jenny, I am angry you borrowed my shirt without asking. Please ask me before taking my things next time. I forgive you."

5. Once the feelings are understood, visualization can help your child let go of any harbored feelings. Hand your child a pretend balloon. Ask him or her to think about the feelings he or she stated—anger, sadness, and embarrassment. Then ask him or her to blow all of those feelings into the pretend balloon. Tell him or her that the balloon is tied to him or her by an imaginary string. When he or she is ready to let go of the feelings, hand over pretend scissors to cut the string and release the feelings. Help your child imagine the balloon sailing high into the sky. When ready, imagine that the balloon gently pops, spreading a dusting of love and compassion to both parties. Remind your child it might take more than once and they can practice the visualization as much as they would like.

6. Write a letter. This is a helpful exercise, particularly for teens. Practice writing a letter stating what caused the upset and how he or she feels about it. Then have your child write a compassion statement or one of forgiveness to the offender and to him- or herself. End the exercise by having him or her rip the letter up and putting it into the garbage, signifying the release of forgiveness.

7. Be the example. Show your child how you forgive others.

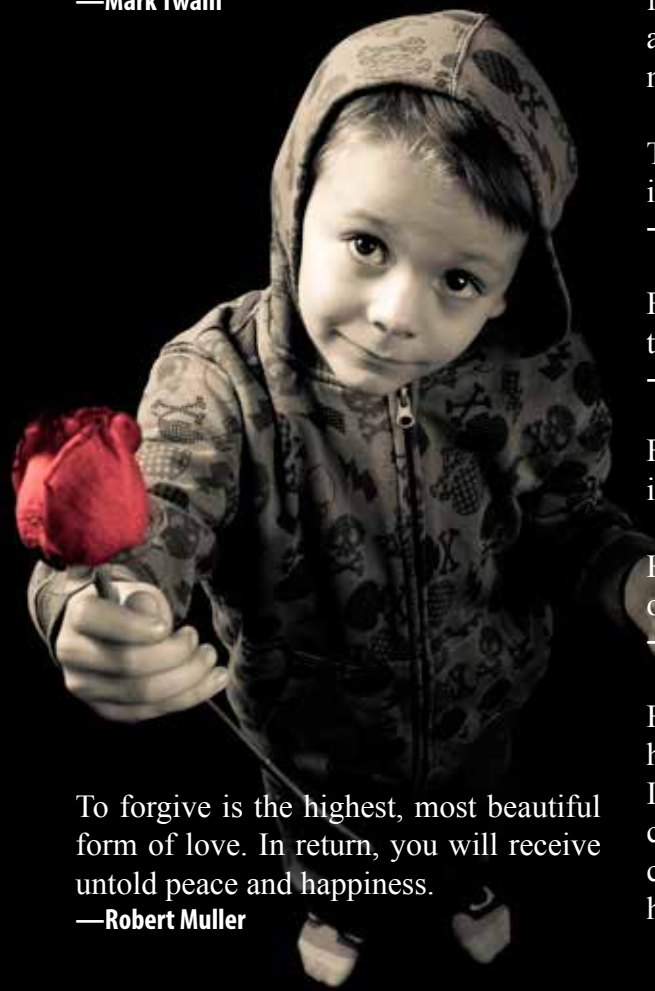
It is important for children to understand that learning to let go may take time. The important lesson is to keep trying, making efforts, understanding forgiveness and loving kindness. Anger plus anger only equals more anger. Compassion and love are what heals. ■

Forgiveness is Power

Notable Quotes

When you hold resentment toward another, you are bound to that person or condition by an emotional link that is stronger than steel. Forgiveness is the only way to dissolve that link and get free.**—Katherine Ponder**

Forgiveness is the fragrance the violet sheds on the heel that has crushed it.
—Mark Twain



To forgive is the highest, most beautiful form of love. In return, you will receive untold peace and happiness.
—Robert Muller

To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you.
—Louis B. Smedes

Sincere forgiveness isn't colored with expectations that the other person [must] apologize or change. Don't worry whether or not they finally understand you. Love them and release them. Life feeds back truth to people in its own way and time—just like it does for you and me.**—Sara Paddison**

The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.
—Mahatma Gandhi

Forgiveness is a funny thing. It warms the heart and cools the sting.
—William Arthur Ward

Forgiveness does not change the past, but it does enlarge the future.**—Paul Boese**

He who cannot forgive breaks the bridge over which he himself must pass.
—George Herbert

Forgiving does not erase the bitter past. A healed memory is not a deleted memory. Instead, forgiving what we cannot forget creates a new way to remember. We change the memory of our past into a hope for our future. **—Louis B. Smedes**