## Lesson 4: Drop resentment & forgive

Resentment is a touchy subject that evokes a great deal of emotion for most. It’s sometimes not an easy task to heal a bruised ego or to let go of the feeling that someone wronged you. But the unfortunate truth is resentment builds a strong connection between you and the source of your emotional distress.

When you allow these negative feelings to hold power over you, they can steal your emotional energy and leave you depleted. Even worse, these emotions can get trapped in your subconscious causing physical pain!

Think about the last time you had unexplained pain, such as your IBS went into overdrive, or your eczema or ulcer flared, or that frozen shoulder / shooting arm pain/on-and-off-again back pain returned with a vengeance. Around the time these pains intensified, had you been feeling upset about something?

This is the crux of the work by Dr. John E. Sarno, *New York Times* [best-selling author](https://www.amazon.com/John-E.-Sarno/e/B001IOBML8/ref=sr_tc_2_0?qid=1495041887&sr=8-2-ent), inspiration for the 2017 movie “[All The Rage](http://rumur.com/all-the-rage/)”, and a medical pioneer who spent more than 50 years studying the mind-body connection of pain. He’s successfully treated thousands of people with unexplained pain by helping them realize that it’s often not an old sports injury or slipped disc that’s the cause of their pain. Rather, he says, it’s their body’s autonomic nervous system protecting them from dealing with their subconscious emotions by triggering a cascade of events that result in bodily pain (essentially replacing one pain for another). He also found that the greater the intensity of these repressed emotions, especially rage, the greater the intensity of the person’s pain. Interestingly, the nicer you are, the more of a people-pleaser you are, the more you take care of others rather than yourself, the more susceptible you are to mind-body pain *(and you probably need to work on boundary setting as described in Lesson 3)*.

Who is it harming when you allow those negative feelings to deplete your positive energy, bury your emotions, and cause the stress-hormone cortisol to fire continuously in your body? You!! Your well-being and health are far more important to you and your loved ones than whatever it is that is causing your resentment.

There is a simple (but not necessarily easy) way to alleviate resentments caused by negative thoughts and repressed emotions. It’s called FORGIVENESS.

Whether it's a spouse who was unfaithful, a [parent](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/parenting) who let you down as a child, or a friend who shared something told in [confidence](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/confidence), we all must face the question of whether and how to forgive.

After you are wronged and the initial wave of emotion has passed, you're presented with a new challenge: Do you forgive the person? By forgiving, you let go of your grievances and judgments and allow yourself to heal.

According to Andrea Brandt, Ph.D., to learn how to forgive, you must first learn what forgiveness is not. Most of us hold at least some misconceptions about forgiveness. Here are some things that forgiving someone doesn't mean:

* Forgiveness doesn't mean you are pardoning or excusing the other person's actions.
* Forgiveness doesn't mean you need to tell the person that he or she is forgiven.
* Forgiveness doesn't mean you shouldn't have any more feelings about the situation.
* Forgiveness doesn't mean there is nothing further to work out in the relationship or that everything is okay now.
* Forgiveness doesn't mean you should forget the incident ever happened.
* Forgiveness doesn't mean you must continue to include the person in your life.
* ... and forgiveness isn't something you do for the other person.

By forgiving, you are accepting the reality of what happened and finding a way to live in a state of resolution with it. This can be a gradual process—and it doesn't necessarily have to include the person you are forgiving. Forgiveness isn't something you do for the person who wronged you; it's something you do for you.

So, if forgiveness is something you do for yourself and if it can help you heal, why is it so hard?

There are several reasons: You're filled with thoughts of retribution or [revenge](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/punishment); you enjoy feeling superior; you don't know how to resolve the situation; you're addicted to the adrenaline that [anger](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/anger) provides; you self-identify as a "victim"; or you're afraid that by forgiving you have to re-connect—or lose your connection—with the other person. These reasons not to forgive can be resolved by becoming more familiar with yourself, with your thoughts and feelings, and with your boundaries and needs.

Now that you know what forgiveness is not and why it's so hard to do, ask yourself: Do I want to forgive?

Forgiveness requires feeling willingto forgive. Sometimes you won't, because the hurt went too deep, or because the person was too abusive, or expressed no regret. Do not attempt to forgive someone before you have identified, fully felt, expressed, and released your anger and pain.

Dr. Brandt suggests if you decide you are willing to forgive, find a good place and time to be alone with your thoughts. Then, try following these four steps to forgive even when it feels impossible:

1. **Think about the incident that angered you.** Accept that it happened. Accept how you felt about it and how it made you react. To forgive, you need to acknowledge the reality of what occurred and how you were affected.
2. **Acknowledge the growth you experienced because of what happened.** What did it make you learn about yourself, or about your needs and boundaries? Not only did you survive the incident, perhaps you grew from it.
3. **Now think about the other person.** He or she is flawed because all human beings are flawed. He or she acted from limited beliefs and a skewed frame of reference because sometimes we all [act](https://www.psychologytoday.com/therapy-types/acceptance-and-commitment-therapy) from our limited beliefs and skewed frames of reference. When you were hurt, the other person was trying to have a need met. What do you think this need was and why did the person go about it in such a hurtful way?
4. **Finally, decide whether or not you want to tell the other person that you have forgiven him or her.** If you decide not to express forgiveness directly, then do it on your own. Say the words, "I forgive you," aloud and then add as much explanation as you feel is merited.

Finally, forgiveness can be very empowering and freeing. In the scheme of things, life is short. You can choose to be in a place of resentment or in a place of joy. You can choose to allow the past to rule your present, or you can choose to live joyfully today to update your past. What do you choose?

**TAKE ACTION**

1. Take a few moments and assess the situation of resentment in your life by writing down everything that comes to mind when you think about what evokes negative feelings in you. It can be a family member or loved one wronging you, or as resentment toward a coworker or even that driver that cut you off this morning. Remember, even the smallest negative feeling can fester and turn into a big unconscious, repressed resentment and cause you pain.
2. Now that you have this list, study it well and take note of where your energy is going. There is one very important truth here: **nobody can harm you without your consent.**Reflect on ways to redirect the negative emotion into positive emotion, and write down those ideas at the bottom of your list.

One way to do this is to **practice FORGIVENESS** *(because forgiveness is a practice just like gratitude)*. A critical part of forgiveness, as we learned in Lessons 1 & 2, is to replace each negative emotion with a positive learning. After you forgive whomever/whatever for making you feel \_\_\_\_\_\_, and after you forgive yourself for feeling \_\_\_\_\_\_, think about what the situation taught you and say, to yourself “I am grateful for learning \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_”.

1. Try women’s health guru Dr. Christiane Northrop’s simple exercises to promote joy and pleasure:

Over the next 30 days, look into the mirror and deep into your own eyes and say: “I love you.” Northrop says you’ll start to believe it after 20 days and by 30 days your life will change *(don’t worry if you cry when you start, it’s common!).* If you find this too uncomfortable, start with a different mantra like “I am worthy”, “I am loved”, “I am abundant” or “I intend to feel good today” and work your way up to “I love you”.

1. If you’re interested in learning more about Dr. Sarno’s teachings, check out his movie “[All The Rage](http://rumur.com/all-the-rage/)”, and his [amazon.com page](https://www.amazon.com/John-E.-Sarno/e/B001IOBML8/ref=sr_tc_2_0?qid=1495041887&sr=8-2-ent) for his books on psychosomatic (mind-body disorders) including:

* *Healing Back Pain: The Mind-Body Connection (1991)*
* *The Mindbody Prescription: Healing the Body, Healing the Pain (1999)*
* *The Divided Mind (2006)*