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Forgiving Your Spouse

Spouses/Couples Forgiveness Exercise:

(If forgiveness is difficult for you or rarely done in your relationship, try this exercise with a less hurtful issue before conducting it with deeper more painful issues. Forgiveness, like any virtue, takes practice.)

1. When you both agree that you are ready to discuss the issue, set a time and place to discuss the issue at hand.
 - a. Cover only one item at a time. The laundry list approach rarely leads to helpful conversation.
 - b. Prepare yourself to be open and honest and to fully hear out the other person's side of the story.
2. Take time to listen to one another's side of the situation without interrupting. Don't give advice. Don't allow yourself to be distracted. Turn off your cell phone, blackberry, television, put the kids to bed, get a babysitter, etc.
 - a. Simply listen to and understand your partner's side of the story. Ask clarifying questions.
 - b. Seek to understand not just the facts of the situation but the feelings as well.
 - c. Reflect back what you believe you hear your partner is saying to assure that you both have the same information and the same understanding of that information.
3. When one person has finished sharing his or her side and feels understood, the other person gets a chance to be heard out fully.
4. Once you both feel understood and heard - Request Forgiveness.
 - a. Throughout the conversation, hopefully offending parties will be more aware of the hurt they caused (in many cases both parties have something to be sorry for). Ask for forgiveness, being as specific as possible. Say something like, "I'm sorry for that (Name what was wrong about the action you took or the words that you said)."
 - b. Requesting an apology can be very healing to the offended party.
5. Grant Forgiveness.
 - a. When forgiveness is being asked of you, be sure to acknowledge the apology. If you are ready, grant forgiveness. Simply saying, "It's OK" is not sufficient. It is not OK. The person is requesting forgiveness of you. Tell him/her if you forgive him/her. If not, say "I accept your apology. But I need more time to work through the painful feelings."
6. When you are ready to forgive or have been forgiven, move on from the hurtful event and discuss ways to avoid this pain in the future.

- a. This may include developing new ways of relating to one another and getting rid of offensive behaviors.
 - b. The offender in particular should verbalize new ways he/she will act so as not to hurt the other.
 - c. Hug as a physical sign that you are moving on and wish a loving relationship to flourish between the two of you.
7. Allow time for trust and healing to occur
- a. If the offense was very hurtful, it may take time for trust and healing to occur.
 - b. Your forgiveness and time together has begun the road to healing. Be patient.

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