

Session 5

Practising Forgiveness

Key learning

Forgiveness is complex but transformational.

Application

Recognise a hurt and try to see if a better relationship is possible.

Habits focus

Be present by recognising hurt. Reimagine the possibilities of relationship where forgiveness is lived out.

Before the session

You will need:

- A clip from a film or TV show about forgiveness, a screen and speaker to show the clip(s). Some possible clips include:
 - Spider-Man and the Sandman, Spider-Man 3 (2007) – the Sandman had killed Peter Parker's uncle; Peter discovers the reason why and forgives him.
 - Thomas and Peter Rabbit apologise to Bea, Peter Rabbit (2018) – Bea blames Thomas for blowing up the rabbit burrow, but it turns out Peter was the one who pressed the button.
 - Shrek and Donkey, Shrek (2001) – Donkey and Shrek both feel badly treated by one another, but they have an important, truth-revealing conversation which helps to heal their relationship.
- To print out the 'Myth-busting' activity worksheet in Appendix 10 on p90.
- Paper clip/pebble/paper

- A sign saying 'Would' and a sign saying 'Wouldn't'
- Your group's vision board



Set up your room

Put the signs saying 'Would' and 'Wouldn't' in different areas of the classroom – students will move between them.

i Important: Exploring the idea of forgiveness can be profound and valuable but it also has the potential to draw out reminders of painful experiences. Therefore, it is important to approach this topic with sensitivity. Participants may have experienced significant trauma and it is important that the session feels safe for everyone. Your role is not to tell anyone that they should forgive a particular person or a particular situation. No-one should feel compelled to forgive - suggesting that we should forgive someone who has harmed us can be traumatic in itself. The activity exploring what forgiveness is not is particularly important here. It may be helpful to focus on 'small forgiveness' (the forgiveness of minor wrongs) as a way of understanding the value and benefits of forgiving.

Be prepared in case the session draws out difficult emotions. Students need to know that they can take time out if they need to. If a student discloses anything which raises a safeguarding concern it is vital that you respond to this in accordance with your school's safeguarding policy.

Intro

 00:00

 5mins

Aim of the session

This session is called **Practising Forgiveness**.

In this session we are going to:

- Explore the idea of forgiveness – what it is and what it is not.
- Recognise the complexity of forgiveness.
- Practise reimagining by seeing how our relationships can be transformed by forgiveness.



Recap

Recap the previous session and remind the group of the three habits of being curious, being present, and reimagining.

Ask your group what they remember from the previous session and if they have any examples of actions or stories from the past week related to the theme.



Activity Holding on

 2 mins

- Ask each person to find a small object that they can hold easily in one hand (e.g. paper clip, piece of scrunched-up paper).
- Challenge them to hold on to this for as long as they can while you continue with the rest of the session. (Explain that the point of this will become clear later on!)



Film

Discuss:

What do we learn about forgiveness in this film?

You might like to draw out examples of the following: recognising a hurt, saying sorry, finding hope.

Choose either Option 1 or Option 2

Option 1






Bible story

The father and his sons (Luke 15:11-32)

Read the retelling of a parable told by Jesus to your group. You can find this in Appendix 8 on p87, at the end of this guide. You may like to invite students to take on the roles of the father and each of the sons.

Questions for discussion:

-  Where do you see forgiveness in the story?
-  Which character do you find it easiest to understand or identify with?
-  We don't know if the older brother forgave his younger brother in the end or not. What do you think would have made it easier for him to forgive and make a fresh start with his brother?



Key learning

Please highlight the points below:

- When the younger son decided to seek his father's forgiveness, this meant changing direction and stopping the behaviour that was hurting others.
- The father's decision to forgive was a free choice, not under pressure from others.
- The older son names the hurt that he is feeling and has an honest conversation with his father. This is an important part of being present.
- We may identify with different characters at different times. Sometimes hurts are done to us – sometimes we hurt others. Recognising this can stop us judging others unfairly.
- Also draw on the **Key learning** from the Bible verse on p61.

Option 2



Bible verse Ephesians 4:32

Share the verse:

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." (NIV)

Question for discussion:

- 🗣️ Is forgiveness important in friendships? Why/why not?
- 🗣️ What do you think about the idea that God forgives?
- 🗣️ Where do you see similar principles and values in other faiths, worldviews or cultures and community traditions?



Key learning

Please highlight the points below:

- God is kind and compassionate and forgives us – we are invited to respond by forgiving others.
- Being kind does not mean pretending nothing has happened – it is good to recognise a hurt has been done to us.
- Forgiving others – doing good to them – doesn't mean trust is restored but it does mean the cycle of hurt can stop.
- Sometimes we are the ones who are asked to forgive – sometimes others are asked to forgive us. Recognising this can stop us judging others unfairly.

Space

00:00

25 mins



Activity Letting go

2 mins

- Ask students if they are still holding on to the object they started holding at the beginning of the session.
- Ask: If you have already let go of the object, why is that?
- Invite those who haven't yet done so to let go of the object.
- Ask: What does it feel like to let go of this object?



Key learning

Please highlight the points below:

- Choosing to let go of hurt and resentment is not just a gift to the other person – it can be liberating and a release for us too.



Activity Myth-busting

🕒 8 mins

Start here



Ask students to turn to their worksheets.

1

Tell the students:

Archbishop Desmond Tutu was a South African priest and activist and his daughter Mpho Tutu is also a South African priest and activist. They wrote a book together exploring forgiveness. In that book, they explain that there are five things that forgiveness is not.

2

Talk through these together and students complete the sentences in worksheets:

- Forgiveness is not **[easy]**, it takes **[hard work]** and **[determination]**.
- Forgiveness is not **[weakness]**, it takes **[courage]** and **[strength]**.
- Forgiveness is not the same as **[letting someone off a punishment]**, but it does mean not seeking **[revenge]**.
- Forgiveness is not **[forgetting]**. We can only **[let go]** of the past if we bravely **[remember]** it.
- Forgiveness is not **[quick]**, it can take **[a long time]**.

3

- Having explored what forgiveness is not, challenge students to come up with a definition of 'forgive' as group.
- Now look up 'forgive' in a dictionary.
- Discuss: Which is a better description – the one we came up with or the one in the dictionary?



Key learning

Please highlight the points below:

- Sometimes there is a misconception that forgiveness is about brushing hurt under the carpet – it is the opposite. Forgiveness involves naming the hurt.
- Forgiveness is not the easy option but it can transform our relationships.
- Forgiveness is an important part of everyday relationships - so that the hurt from the past can be addressed and enabling us to move towards the future we want for the relationship.



Activity

Would you forgive?

🕒 15 mins

Start here



Note: If you would prefer not to show film clips, there is an alternative version of the activity using scenarios instead. Details can be found at the end of this guide - see Appendix 9 on p88.

Before the session:

- Find one or two clips from movies or TV shows on forgiveness (examples on p56).
- Put up signs saying 'Would' and 'Wouldn't' in two different areas of the room.

1

Play the video clip (explaining the context of the clip first).

2

- Invite the group to imagine that they are in the shoes of the person being asked to forgive.
- Ask participants to move to the appropriate sign that reflects whether they would or would not forgive.
- Ask a couple of people for feedback on why they chose that position.

3

Once they have finished, open up a group discussion. You might want to draw out some of the following themes:



Does forgiveness require an apology?



What if the person who has hurt us is not sorry, or unwilling to apologise?



What makes it difficult to say sorry?



Are there times we should forgive?



Key learning

Please highlight the points below:

- We've seen how forgiveness is presented in a movie – this can be oversimplified, unrealistically quick and not representative of the way things are.
- Forgiveness is complex – we will not all respond in the same way to the same situations.
- Saying sorry and forgiving is an important part of our everyday relationships and friendships.
- Making amends for hurt caused can help trust to be restored.
- Forgiveness doesn't always mean maintaining proximity with the person who has hurt us.



Vision board

Guide your group through this activity using the instructions below:

- 1.** Ask a volunteer to write the definition of 'forgive' that they came up with on the vision board.
- 2.** Reflect silently:
 - Is there anyone that you would like to say sorry to?
 - Is there anyone that you would like to forgive?
- 3.** Share this quotation from Archbishop Tutu:

'When I cultivate forgiveness in my small everyday encounters, I am preparing for a time when a much larger act of forgiveness will be asked of me, as it most certainly will... When I develop a mindset of forgiveness, rather than a mindset of grievance, I don't just forgive a particular act; I become a more forgiving person... What was once a reason for rupture and alienation becomes an opportunity for repair and greater intimacy.'¹
- 4.** Remind students how to access support if anyone is finding any of this difficult and would like to talk further about forgiveness.



Top takeaway

Ask your group (to write down or say aloud):

What is something you want to remember from this session?

Give the group a few minutes to reflect before answering.

¹ Tutu, Desmond and Tutu, Mpho, *The Book of Forgiving: The Fourfold Path for Healing Ourselves and Our World*, William Collins, 2014.



Prayer and reflection

Please use this as a prayer or guide for reflection:

Loving God, fill us with your Spirit now. We thank you that you love and forgive everybody.

We think about the stories we have heard about forgiveness.

Help us to **be curious** about others' stories – listening as often as we speak.

We think about what we have learnt about recognising a hurt.

Give us the courage to **be present** – showing up and sticking around.

We think about the things we have learned about forgiving and seeking forgiveness.

Inspire us to **reimagine** what's possible – finding hope, knowing that you can transform all things.

In Jesus' name. Amen

Notes

End of session 5