

PREPARE ENRICH

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Forgiveness in Marriage (2010)

When the new Customized Version of PREPARE/ENRICH was designed, a new Forgiveness scale of 10 statements was created for all married couples. The PREPARE/ENRICH Forgiveness scale is unique in that it looks specifically at forgiveness within a married couple's relationship.

The Forgiveness category measures each person's ability to forgive one another. It looks at how well they both *request* and *grant* forgiveness in their relationship. The new scale has excellent statistical reliability (Cronbach's Alpha Reliability = .89).

A recent doctoral dissertation (Moultet, 2009) did a validity study by comparing the new Forgiveness scale with other forgiveness surveys. The study found the new scale correlated highly with other established measures of forgiveness.

Sample Items:

My partner has done or said some things I may never be able to forgive.

I feel closer to my partner after we work through a disappointment.

My partner does a good job of apologizing and asking for forgiveness.

Significant Findings

We analyzed 7,034 married couples to investigate how well forgiveness differentiated healthy from unhealthy marriages. In comparing healthy Vitalized couples with struggling Devitalized couples, the forgiveness results were compelling. Over 86% of the Vitalized couples had forgiveness as a relational strength, but less than 1% of the Devitalized couples reported a healthy ability to forgive one another and move forward in their relationship. For Devitalized couples, forgiveness was a relational growth area over 86% of the time.

Across the entire sample of seven thousand married couples, 46% had forgiveness as a growth area while only about 27% had forgiveness as a strength in their relationship. This underscores the need to teach forgiveness as a skill.

	Growth Area	Possible Growth Area	Possible Strength	Strength
Vitalized	1%	3%	10%	87%
Harmonious	5%	13%	31%	51%
Conventional	19%	30%	29%	23%
Conflicted	58%	28%	11%	3%
Devitalized	87%	11%	2%	1%
Total	46%	15%	12%	27%

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Forgiveness in Marriage

All married couples eventually experience times of conflict, hurt, and letting each other down. Sometimes the offense is as minor as forgetting a date or failing to run an errand. For some couples, the offense might involve a major betrayal such as infidelity, addiction, or abuse. Either way, taking time to seek and grant forgiveness can play a powerful role in healing and restoring the relationship.

Forgiveness is the decision or choice to give up the right for vengeance, retribution, and negative thoughts toward an offender in order to be free from anger and resentment. This process promotes healing and restoration of inner peace, and can allow reconciliation to take place in the relationship.

It is also important to be clear what forgiveness is not. Forgiveness is not forgetting, condoning, or perpetuating injustice. Since it is sometimes unsafe or impossible, forgiveness does not always involve reconciliation. Forgiveness is not always quick; it is a process that can take time to unfold. Don't rush your partner if they need to spend days or weeks working through the process of granting forgiveness.

Six Steps for Seeking Forgiveness:

1. Admit what you did was wrong or hurtful.
2. Try to understand/empathize with the pain you have caused.
3. Take responsibility for your actions and make restitution if necessary.
4. Assure your partner you will try not to do it again.
5. Apologize and ask for forgiveness.
6. Forgive yourself.

Six Steps for Granting Forgiveness:

1. Acknowledge your pain and anger.
2. Be specific about your future expectations and limits.
3. Give up your right to "get even".
4. Let go of blame, resentment, and negativity.
5. Communicate your act of forgiveness to your partner.
6. Work toward reconciliation (when safe)

Reference:

Mouttet, K. L. R. (2009) Unpublished doctoral dissertation. *A Comparative Analysis of Three Scales Intended to Measure Forgiveness*. Regent University.