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**It’s time to get unstuck.**

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**6 Steps to Let Go of a Grudge**

Consider the trade-offs of forgiving and letting go. You may find that you will regain a sense of freedom and the ability to trust.

A grudge is a worn, ugly, itchy sweater you can't get rid of – because if you do, how will you stay warm? Nursing a grievance is part of human nature: At some point, almost [everyone does it](https://health.usnews.com/health-news/health-wellness/articles/2016-01-20/are-you-catching-other-peoples-emotions). Freeing yourself from a festering grudge that's taken on a life of its own isn't easy. But the relief and lightness you'll feel are worth it. Below, [therapists](https://health.usnews.com/health-news/patient-advice/articles/2014/11/26/what-kind-of-therapist-and-which-type-of-therapy-is-right-for-you) explain how grudges hurt you and outline steps for letting go.

**The Unforgiven**

The unfaithful partner, the uncaring parent, the ex-best friend who shunned you. The workplace bully, the criminal, even your younger self. You have a genuine grievance. Now what?

After a betrayal of a friend “trash talking” about you, the urge to protect yourself from further hurt or pain is common, says Jeff Harris, the University of Southern California.

"We recognize that we've been hurt and are out of power and may be vulnerable," says Harris, a licensed counselor. "We don't like that vulnerability, and that's OK – that's adaptive." Hanging onto the hurt can be a "power bargaining chip" in a relationship, he says, one the injured partner can play at any time: "Don't bring up your complaint about me – remember when?"

Continuing to keep a friend or family member at arm's length from mistrust prevents the [relationship](https://health.usnews.com/health-news/blogs/eat-run/2014/10/09/why-relationships-are-crucial-to-your-health-and-happiness) from becoming deeper and more satisfying, Harris says, even when someone offers an apology and actively changes his or her behavior.

Sometimes, of course, that apology never comes. In the absence of hearing "I'm sorry," or without any sense that the person who's harmed you cares that you've suffered, it's as if "scar tissue" forms, says Nancy Colier, [a psychotherapist](http://nancycolier.com/?p=469) in New York City.

"We can hold this out for others to see: 'I was wronged, and I'm angry,' as a way to get some kind of caring," Colier says. "Rather than an authentic experience of caring, it becomes kind of cemented to our identity, as one who was wronged, 'so therefore I'm deserving of kindness.'"

Grudges have a corrosive effect on your emotional and physical health. Being stuck in an angry, unforgiving state puts your body into fight-or-flight mode. In a [July 2014 article](http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/news/publications/johns_hopkins_health/summer_2014/the_healing_power_of_forgiveness) on the healing power of forgiveness. Hormones that are released can raise your blood pressure and heart rate and put you on edge. And the negative, untrusting mindset you hold may spill into other relationships.

**Steps for Letting Go**

Grudges take time to grow, and getting rid of them is a process. You can follow these steps on your own, or a therapist can help you through.

**Acknowledge the hurt.** You were wronged, and that's real. Describing what happened and how it made you feel is a start – whether you write it in a journal or in a letter you might never send to the person at the center of your grudge. Telling these truths can be an incredibly powerful process, when you get them in the imaginary chair and express anger. Give yourself credit for what you've done to try to cope with the original offense.

**Decide to forgive.** [Forgiving](https://health.usnews.com/health-news/articles/2012/08/29/how-to-forgive-and-why-you-should) someone who hurt you is a gift you give to yourself. It doesn't mean you have to forget the offense or reconcile. It's not about getting the other person to act differently. It might even be forgiving yourself for something you've done or how you've behaved, along with trying to make amends.

**Realize forgiving isn't condoning.** Acceptance does not equal agreement, people may have a well-practiced sense of justice and fairness, and even though they logically get it – that it's going to be important for them to let go; that they can't control something – they fear if they abandon the fight or release the anger, the perpetrator will believe that they won, or that the victim agrees with what was done. What acceptance might really means is, "I can't go back and create a better version of the past."

**Ask yourself: Why?** People realize the grudge is a problem when they sense their own progress being blocked. They're almost bored, and the grievance is starting to feel old and as if it doesn't matter as much anymore. And yet … letting go feels threatening because it takes away the default of "Look what happened to me." You also might be anxious that losing the grudge will leave you empty. Instead, you're making room for healthier feelings to fill that space.

**Consider the trade-off.** Connect to the benefits that will come to you when you make a commitment to forgive and let go. Often, those are peace of mind, regaining personal energy that has been wasted chasing your grievance over and over, a sense of freedom and the ability for trust to be rebuilt in a more genuine way.

**Don't let anger define you.** People can forgive horrible wrongs, even heinous crimes. "I was so touched by the parishioners in the church in South Carolina, who within days were publicly coming out and openly describing their forgiveness for the shooter," Harris says. "But they still had a right to see that justice would be carried out. They all needed that, and they wanted that. They *didn't* want to have the violent act of this loner define their life as something that had to be deeply angry and painful moving forward."