

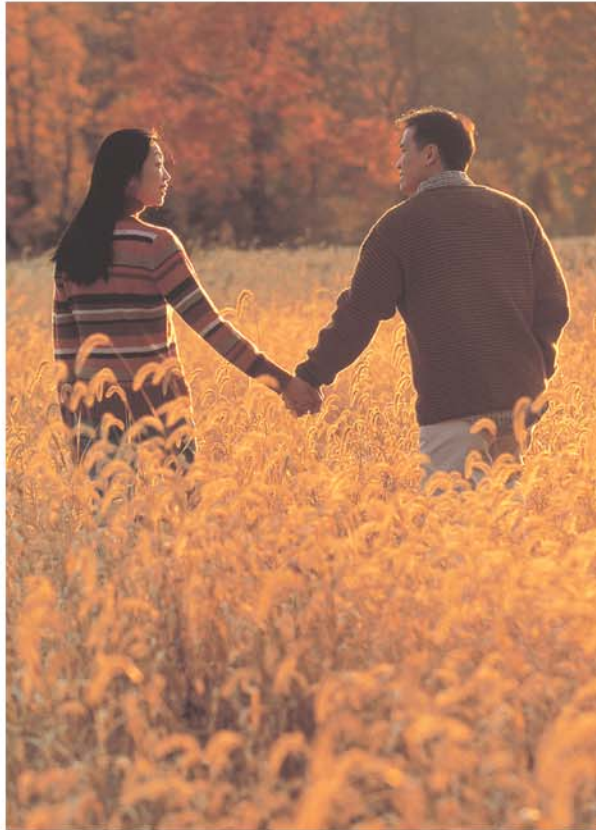
Why do the people closest to us have the power to offend us the most? Part of the answer lies in our ability to feel the emotion of love.

To fully experience the emotion of love, we must first lower our protective emotional walls. Once we lower our walls we leave ourselves vulnerable to getting hurt. Since no one is perfect, we all do and say things that offend those we love the most.

How we choose to react when we have offended or been offended by our spouse will determine if we are able to form and sustain a healthy marriage.

Forgiving and offering a sincere apology are two of the most effective medicines to heal a marriage, although they aren't always easy to administer. However, the question you need to ask yourself is, "Do I want to feel anger, resentment, bitterness, pain and misery?" or "Do I want to feel love, peace, joy and happiness?"

To feel these positive emotions, you need to forgive your spouse when he or she offends you and offer a sincere apology when you offend him or her.



In essence, forgiveness is the process of replacing the feelings of bitterness, anger and hurt with love. The following five steps can help you forgive:

1. Calm down before speaking to your spouse.

2. After you calm down, tell your spouse what he or she did to offend you. In many cases, you will find it was unintentional or a simple misunderstanding.

3. Recognize you aren't perfect either. Think of the many times your spouse has forgiven you for offending him or her.

4. Think of three memories where your feeling of love was especially strong towards your spouse. Whenever you feel bitterness, anger and hurt, think of these three memories.

5. Don't be discouraged when you can't replace the feelings of bitterness, anger and hurt with love overnight. It may take time. Be patient and don't give up.

Going through the process of forgiveness does not mean you should leave yourself vulnerable to being hurt again by unacceptable actions. Domestic violence is one example of this. If you are a victim of domestic violence, you should seek professional help immediately.

It is also important to learn how to offer a sincere apology. There are three crucial steps in making a sincere apology to your spouse:

1. Recognize exactly what you did to offend your spouse.
2. Develop a plan to not repeat the same mistake again.
3. Tell him or her you are sorry.

Some people skip the first two steps and go straight to the third. By doing this the healing power of the words “I’m sorry” will lose their effectiveness and make the situation worse.

Action Plan

Think of something you have recently done to offend your spouse and begin the steps of apologizing.

Think of something your spouse has done that offended you and begin the steps of forgiveness.

Visit healthymarriage.org to read the other topics in this pamphlet series.



Did you know on average, children, women, men and communities do better on every positive social outcome such as physical and emotional health, education, safety, financial, etc., when a couple has a healthy marriage?

All couples want a healthy and happy marriage. Many couples have been able to figure out through years of trial and error what it takes to form and sustain a healthy marriage. By studying these couples, researchers have identified the relationship skills and knowledge used to keep marriages healthy.

This pamphlet is part of the research-based Healthy Marriage Pamphlet Series which is designed to teach the relationship skills and knowledge to help couples form and sustain healthy marriages.

We need your help distributing these pamphlets. Feel free to photocopy this pamphlet, or visit www.healthymarriage.org to download and print the other topics in this series.

Marriage

Increase the Joy
Decrease the Misery



Forgiveness

A Key to Unlocking the Door to
a Healthy and Happy Marriage