

Steps to Forgiveness

This lesson helps students understand tangible steps to help them forgive others. It takes empathy to put yourself in someone else's shoes and accept their apology. Through instruction and story, students can see how forgiveness can be given and the positive impact forgiveness has not only on others but also on ourselves.

Caring Sub-Concept(s)

Empathy, Kindness

Lesson Timeframe

35-40 minutes

Required Materials

- ☐ Jar
- ☐ Index Cards
- ☐ “The Lemon Moon” by Edith Hope Fine.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h3bELLiYqv8>
- ☐ Journal materials (paper, pencils)

Standards Map

This lesson aligns with CASEL Competencies, National Health Education Standards, and Common Core State Standards. Please refer to the [Standards Map](#) for more information.



**DESIGNATED BY CASEL
AS A RECOMMENDED PROGRAM
FOR SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING.**
See last page for details.

Trigger warning: Talking about emotions and situations where strong emotions arise can lead to students revealing personal information that might require follow-up by yourself or a school counselor. If a student reveals any worrisome information or reaction, please know your school protocol for providing support and resources. Before class, find out the school policy about reporting a concern about a student's mental health to a school counselor or administrator.

Lesson Objective

Students will:

- Learn how forgiving others helps them to live happier lives.
- Connect the importance and impact of forgiveness with caring.

Teacher Connection/Self-Care

Pick one person in your community to empathize with and place yourself in their shoes for one day. Break it down by different locations and times. Compassion and empathy can only develop through practice.

Tips for Diverse Learners

- While forgiveness is a crucial skill, some kids may be struggling with past traumas and need more assistance than you are able to provide in this activity. If trauma is revealed through this activity be sure to seek the advice of the school counselor.



Share

3-5 minutes

Create a quick “encouragement jar” as a class. Grab a stack of index cards and ask students to share encouraging words for a friend that is struggling. What would you say to help them feel better?

Teacher (and possibly a student volunteer if desired) writes down the responses and places them in a jar. When anyone in class is feeling down they can take out an “encouragement card” to read.

When we care for someone, we notice how they feel and work with them to feel better.



Inspire

7-10 minutes

Even when we care for someone, such as our friends, we can and will stumble sometimes. We are human and we will sometimes hurt others feelings and others will hurt our feelings. Part of friendship is forgiveness.

Today we are going to talk about forgiveness, which is another important part of interacting and communicating with others and being kind to ourselves. Can anyone tell me what it means to forgive someone? Why do you think forgiveness might be important?

Good! Forgiveness is letting go when you are mad at someone for what they did. It might be for something big or small. You may forgive someone for something minor like bumping into you, or leaving you out at recess, or forgetting to wish you a happy birthday. You may forgive someone for a big thing like telling you they aren't your friend anymore or hurting you on purpose. Forgiveness isn't easy and it might take a long time to forgive someone or for someone to forgive you. Forgiveness can build and keep friendships and relationships and help you to feel at peace in yourself. Let's talk about what forgiveness is and what it isn't.

For visual learners or ELL students, displaying this on the board or through pictures would be useful

Forgiveness isn't:

- Forgetting what happened
- Saying what the person did is okay
- Feeling okay about what happened
- Making the other person apologize or waiting for them to apologize

Forgiveness is:

- Accepting the reality of what happened
- Letting go of bad feelings towards the person
- Not holding what someone did in the past against them
- Seeing what happens in the future actions of yourself or someone else.

- Forgiving someone whether they deserve it or not because you need to take care of yourself

Why forgive? Research shows that if we are forgiving:

- It makes us happier.
- It is a kindness to ourselves.
- It shows compassion to others.
- It improves our health.

When we forgive, we show caring not only for the other person but also for ourselves. Forgiveness is a powerful form of self-care.



Empower

15-20 minutes

There are some specific steps we can take to help us forgive someone, just like there are steps we can take to make a sincere apology to someone. Here are the steps:

Step 1: Identify: Figure out what happened and the consequences of the action. Sometimes you don't even know how mad or sad you are until you think about it. For example: When the person yelled at me, I felt really hurt and like I couldn't tell them something in the future

Step 2: Decide: Decide you're ready to forgive the person and move forward. If you're not ready to forgive yet, go back to Step 1. You do not need to forgive right away. For example: I'm tired of being mad and it's not helping anymore. I'm ready to forgive and move on.

Step 3: Forgive: Accept that the past is in the past and you can only change the future. You do not need to excuse the behavior, but move forward. For example: You may think, "I know yelling at someone isn't right, but I know it happens," and/or tell the person you're not mad anymore and you forgive them.

Step 4: Reflect: Explore what you have learned from this experience and how it will change how you do things in the future. For example: Next time someone yells at me, I'm going to say, "Don't talk to me like that," and walk away.

Read Aloud: "The Lemon Moon" by Edith Hope Fine.

Read Aloud Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h3bELLiYqv8> (9 min)

Pretend you are Rosalinda. In your journal (or on a piece of paper), write down (or draw a picture, for students with limited writing skills) how you, as Rosalinda, moved through the four stages of forgiveness toward the man who took all the lemons from her lemon tree. Don't forget to reflect on your experience!



Reflect

5 minutes

To gauge understanding, ask some students to share their journal reflections.

Just like there are steps to apologizing, there are steps for forgiveness, too. If you feel there is someone in your life you need to forgive, start moving through the steps. If you are able to get through Steps 1-3, try taking action on them and then complete Step 4. Likely, you will feel full and content like Rosalinda did.

Forgiving others plays a large role in our own health. In order for us to live happy lives, we must learn to forgive those who have hurt us and move past the hurt. When we are able to forgive someone, we start feeling better ourselves. Forgiveness is a form of self kindness, but it also allows others to be better versions of themselves than they were in the past.



Extension Ideas

- They could do the Steps to Forgive worksheet at home - http://rak-materials.s3.amazonaws.com/cde/en/05.4_healthy_communication_unit_steps_to_forgiveness.pdf
- Incorporate lemons into the lesson. Perhaps everyone gets a lemon to give to someone they want to forgive or when a student consciously forgives someone, they put a lemon on a bulletin board. When each student has put a lemon on the board, you make lemonade and celebrate.

Helpful Resources:

The New Science of Forgiveness:

berkeley.edu/article/item/the_new_science_of_forgiveness

8 Ways Forgiveness is Good for Your Health:

huffingtonpost.com/2014/10/25/forgiveness-health-benefits_n_6029736.html

How to Teach a Child Forgiveness:

psychcentral.com/blog/how-to-teach-a-child-forgiveness/

In order to understand forgiveness, it is important to understand what it is and is not. Bob Enright, a leading researcher on forgiveness, outlines the eight keys to forgiveness:

berkeley.edu/article/item/eight_keys_to_forgiveness

Article by the Greater Good on the definition of forgiveness:

berkeley.edu/topic/forgiveness/definition



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The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has been reviewing evidence-based SEL programs since 2003. Kindness in the Classroom® meets CASEL's SElect Program and is included in the CASEL Guide to Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs.

Kindness in the Classroom® met or exceeded all of CASEL's criteria for high-quality SEL programming. Kindness in the Classroom® received CASEL's highest designation for high-quality SEL programming.

<https://casel.org/guide/kindness-in-the-classroom/>