

# Letting Go of Grudges

## Objective

To identify and let go of your grudges.

## You Should Know

Do you hold grudges? Holding a grudge involves replaying a past injustice over and over in your head. If you are holding a grudge, you repeatedly get caught up in the emotions associated with the situation long after it has passed. Do you really want to stay “stuck” and keep rehashing painful situations? What will it take for you to move on and let go?

Holding grudges weighs you down. When you hold grudges, it is not possible to heal your emotional pain. And holding grudges may actually harm your health. In one study, adults who held grudges for more than a decade experienced greater cognitive decline than those who were more forgiving. Some studies even suggest that holding grudges may increase stress hormones such as cortisol, negatively impacting your immune system.

The longer you hold a grudge the more difficult it is to forgive and move on. To let go of a grudge, shift your focus off the person who “wronged” you and the story of your suffering. Here are steps you can take to let go of a grudge.

1. **Acknowledge the problem.** Identify the grudge and what is causing you to hold onto it.
2. **Identify your feelings.** A grudge can form when a problem is not fully confronted or solved. Clarify your feelings on the situation. Then, decide if this is something you will work on yourself, or if you need to contact the person involved.
3. **Gain understanding.** Sometimes it is helpful to put yourself in the other person’s shoes to understand their point of view and behavior. Understanding the other person does not justify their behavior, or that you were wronged, but it might make it easier to let go of the grudge.
4. **Acceptance.** Consciously choose to release the grudge – with or without an apology. The other person may never come around, and they might have forgotten about the issue or not even realize how you were affected. Even if you do not receive an apology, the other person might be remorseful. Some people are unable to apologize.
5. **Move on and avoid dwelling on it.** Once you decide to move on and release the grudge, keep moving forward. Do not spend time thinking about the situation, or repeatedly discuss it with others. If the issue is brought up in conversation, change the subject.

6. **Consider the positive.** You can view the situation that caused your grudge as a learning experience. Trying to understand the person you were angry at can help you let go of the grudge and release lingering resentment.

7. **Let go.** Making a determined and sincere effort to let go of a grudge can lead to feelings of calm and greater happiness.

8. **Forgive.** Forgiving the person does not mean forgetting about what happened; it is simply acknowledging differences and accepting that everyone makes mistakes. Forgiving is not always easy – especially if you have experienced hurt and pain – but it is an important way to have more peace in your life.

### **What to Do**

First, reflect on grudges you are holding against other people, including family members, friends, or a spouse or partner. On the chart on the next page, write down the grudges you are holding, and next to each statement, rate the intensity of your anger on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 = little to no anger, and 10 = extreme anger or fury.

Name of person	Grudge	How long have you held this grudge?	Intensity (1-10)

Which grudge is hardest to release?

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Which grudge might be easiest to release?

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Choose one grudge to work on releasing. Write it down.

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How does it benefit you to hold onto this grudge?

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Is this a grudge you can let go of yourself or do you need help from a professional?

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What can you do to better understand the other person and their behavior?

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Are you able to accept the situation as it is, even without an apology?

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What can you learn from this situation? About yourself? About the other person?

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## Reflections on This Exercise

What else can you do to let go of grudges?

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On a 1 to 10 scale, how successful were you at letting go of your grudges, where 1 = not at all successfully, and 10 = completely successful: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you ready to let go of additional grudges? Explain.

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Do you feel differently about yourself or your life now that you have completed this exercise?

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How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_  
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

Is there anything in particular you learned in this exercise that was helpful?

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