

## HANDOUTS

# *Don't Ask Me To Forgive You!* *A Radical Approach to Healing Interpersonal Wounds*

**Janis Abrahms Spring, Ph.D., ABPP**

### Morning

#### 8:30 **Assumptions About What It Means To Forgive**

- Is forgiveness good for us?
- Is forgiveness a private gift or an interpersonal exchange?

#### **Cheap Forgiveness & Refusing to Forgive**

- Why narcissists refuse to forgive
- Why others forgive too easily
- Why refusing to forgive or forgiving too cheaply is unhealthy

9:50 Break (coffee and tea)

#### 10:05 **Acceptance – A Radical Alternative**

*What hurt parties can do to heal themselves, including:*

- Release their obsessive preoccupation with the injury and need for revenge
- Frame the offender's mistreatment in terms of the offender's personal damage and life stresses

11:30 p.m. Lunch (on your own)

### Afternoon

#### 12:45 **Acceptance – A Radical Alternative, continued**

- Correct misperceptions about the offender and the offense
- Challenge their official story about their innocence
- Forge a relationship with offenders that serves their best interest

2:05 Break (coffee, tea, soda, snack)

#### 2:20 **Genuine Forgiveness – An Intimate Dance**

*What offenders must do to earn forgiveness, including:*

- Challenge the assumptions that block their ability to make meaningful repairs
- Bear witness to the pain they caused
- Make an effective apology
- Seek to understand their behavior so they never repeat the transgression
- Work to earn back trust

#### **Acceptance – A Radical Alternative**

*What hurt parties can do to foster forgiveness*

3:45 Adjournment (pick up CE certificate)

**Dr. Janis Abrahms Spring, Ph.D., ABPP**

20 Country Rd

Westport, CT 06880-2525

203-227-4771

jaspring@optonline.net

www.janisaspring.com

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**J&K Seminars, LLC**

1861 Wickersham Lane

Lancaster, PA 17603-2327

(800) 801-5415

jk@jkseminars.com

www.jkseminars.com

## ***How Can I Forgive You?***

The Courage to Forgive,  
The Freedom Not To

*Janis Abrahms Spring, Ph.D., ABPP*

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### ***Four Approaches to Forgiveness***

#### *Two Healthy Approaches*

- Acceptance
- Genuine Forgiveness

#### *Two Dysfunctional Approaches*

- Cheap Forgiveness
- Refusing to Forgive

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### ***Four Approaches to Forgiveness: A Comparison***

	The hurt party comes to terms with the injury	The offender participates in the healing process	This leads to reconciliation
<i>Cheap Forgiveness</i>	No	No	Yes
<i>Refusing to Forgive</i>	No	No	No
<i>Acceptance</i>	Yes	No	Yes or No
<i>Genuine Forgiveness</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes (often) or No

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***What is Cheap Forgiveness?***

- Cheap Forgiveness is a quick and easy pardon with no processing of emotion and no coming to terms with the injury.
- It is premature, superficial, undeserved.
- It is an unconditional, unilateral, often compulsive attempt at peacekeeping.
- It is a gratuitous gift for which the hurt party asks nothing in return.

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***Types of Cheap Forgivers***

- The conflict avoider
- The passive-aggressor
- The self-sacrificer

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***Fears of the Conflict Avoider***

- The offender will retaliate with anger or violence.
- The offender will reject or abandon her.
- By speaking up for herself, she may harm the offender.

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***The Advantages of Cheap Forgiveness***

1. It may keep the hurt party connected to the offender.
2. It may make her feel good about herself, even righteous and superior.
3. It may protect her from confronting her own complicity in the conflict, and wipe her slate clean, too.
4. It may nudge the transgressor toward repentance.
5. The hurt party believes that it's good for her health.

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***The Disadvantages of Cheap Forgiveness***

1. It may preserve the hurt party's relationship but quash any opportunity to develop a more intimate bond.
2. It may make her feel morally superior to the offender but prevent her from getting close.
3. It blocks personal growth, denying her insights into herself that may help her develop more satisfying relationships.
4. It may give the transgressor a green light to continue mistreating her.
5. It may make her sick, emotionally and physically.

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***Origins of Cheap Forgiveness***

- life experiences
- religious and cultural teachings
- biological influences

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***The Pattern of Cheap Forgiveness***

*Cheap forgivers*

- compulsively seek to repair relationships, regardless of circumstances or their feelings
- beat up on themselves when someone mistreats them
- make excuses for the offender
- repress or deny violation
- fail to know their anger or their despair
- fail to voice their objections or their needs

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***The Pattern of Cheap Forgiveness***

- often feel powerless, trapped, manipulated, snuffed out
- pardon the offender as a way of asserting their control, dominance, or moral superiority
- extend a generosity of spirit to everyone and therefore to no one

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***What is Refusing to Forgive?***

- Refusing to Forgive is a reactive, rigid, often compulsive response to violation that cuts hurt parties off from life and leaves them stewing in their own hostile juices.
- It is their decision to continue to punish the offender and reject reconciliation, even if that decision punishes them.

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***Origins of Not Forgiving***

- Life experiences
- Religious and cultural teachings
- Biological influences

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***Qualities of Narcissists That Make It Hard for Them to Forgive***

*Narcissists*

- feel entitled to special rights and privileges
- tend to be demanding or selfish
- expect favors without assuming reciprocal responsibilities
- are easily wounded or enraged when others don't comply with their agenda
- can't see others as separate individuals with their own needs

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***Qualities of Narcissists That Make It Hard for Them to Forgive***

- are dependent on the admiration of others to keep their self-esteem afloat
- are hypersensitive to anyone who threatens their sense of specialness
- lack humility and empathy
- are unable to accept any degree of complicity
- seek retribution

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***Qualities of Type A Personalities  
That Make It Hard for Them to Forgive***

*Type A Personalities*

- tend to be power-oriented, hostile, and condescending
- tend to over-react to minor frustrations and be impatient, self-centered, and demanding

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***The Pattern of Refusing to Forgive***

*Non-forgivers*

- get insulted and offended too easily
- have too many confrontations with people
- jump to conclusions, take what people say or do too personally, and react with arrogance or indignation
- tend to harbor grudges forever
- Cut themselves off from those who hurt them without wrestling with the truth about what actually happened

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***The Pattern of Refusing to Forgive***

- find that apologies are never good enough to warrant their letting go of the offense
- take comfort in the role of victim and fail to see that the injury wasn't simply something done to them, but something they may have been partly responsible for
- dream of ways of crushing their opponent and fill their time with retaliatory fantasies that make them feel powerful, superior, and in control

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***The Advantages of Not Forgiving***

- It makes hurt parties feel invulnerable.
- It lets them blame others for their own failings.
- It replaces the emptiness inside them with a surge of elation.

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***The Disadvantages of Not Forgiving***

- Not Forgiving blocks any dialogue with the offender and any positive resolution of the conflict.
- It may restore the hurt party's pride but forfeits any opportunity for personal growth and understanding.
- Not Forgiving may make hurt parties feel less empty but poisons them physically and emotionally, and cuts them off from life.

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***What is Acceptance?***

- Acceptance is a responsible, authentic response to an interpersonal injury when the offender can't or won't engage in the healing process – when he is unwilling or unable to make good.
- It is a program of self-care, a generous and healing gift which the hurt party makes to herself, for herself.
- It asks nothing of the offender.

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***The Ten Steps of Acceptance***

*Hurt Parties*

- Step 1: Honor the full sweep of their emotions
- Step 2: Give up their need for revenge but continue to seek a just resolution
- Step 3: Stop obsessing about the injury and reengage with life
- Step 4: Protect themselves from further abuse
- Step 5: Frame the offender's behavior in terms of his own personal struggles

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***Concrete Strategies to Control Obsessive Thinking***

*Hurt Parties can*

- Challenge their negative thoughts
- Question their habitual response to injury
- Take medication
- Use distraction
- Use thought stopping
- Seek social support
- Normalize their response
- Use relaxation, visualization, meditation
- Apply stimulus control
- Adopt a program of self-care

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***The Ten Steps of Acceptance***

- Step 6: Look honestly at their own contribution to the injury
- Step 7: Challenge their false assumptions about what happened
- Step 8: Look at the offender apart from his offense, weighing the good against the bad
- Step 9: Carefully decide what kind of relationship they want with him
- Step 10: Forgive themselves for their own failings

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***Embracing their “Official Story” of Abuse Lets Hurt Parties***

- see themselves as good, right, fair, and virtuous
- disavow the destructive impact their behavior has on others
- hold others responsible for whatever goes wrong in their lives
- hide behind a veil of oppression when it's they who fail to protect or promote themselves

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***Questioning their “Official Story” Helps Hurt Parties to***

- get clear about what happened – who did what to whom
- sort out their feelings about the offense and the offender
- decide what they want to correct in themselves that would foster more authentic, gratifying interactions
- transcend the traumatic effects of their childhood

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***Common Cognitive Errors***

- Dichotomous thinking
- Mind reading
- Overgeneralization
- Personalization
- Jumping to conclusions
- Should statements

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***To Correct Our Negative Thoughts,  
We Ask Ourselves***

- Is this idea true? What cognitive error might I be making?
- Is this idea useful? What feelings and behaviors does it generate in me?
- Is this idea typical of the way I think? What's my pattern?
- What can I do differently?

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***The Flip-Flop Factor***

Negative Attributes ("Flop" side)	Positive Attributes ("Flip" side)
lacks spontaneity, passion, and a sense of adventure; boring	stable, reliable, even tempered, content
constantly seeks approval; unassertive, ineffectual, weak	considerate, attentive, accommodating
spaced out, self-absorbed, irresponsible	creative, flexible, spontaneous
joyless, compulsive, materialistic, driven	disciplined, productive, effective, responsible, successful

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***The Flip-Flop Factor***

Negative Attributes ("Flop" side)	Positive Attributes ("Flip" side)
narcissistic, attention-seeking	affable, socially skilled, gregarious
depressing, burdensome	deep, thoughtful
silly, superficial	fun-loving, capricious
suffocatingly invasive, needy, controlling	attentive, generous, giving, involved

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***Reasons to Accept the Unapologetic Offender and Reconcile***

- The hurt party has to interact with him regularly and finds that it takes too much energy to remain cold and distant.
- Having no relationship feels worse than having some.
- She benefits strategically from an ongoing relationship.
- She hopes to have new, corrective experiences that might repair the relationship.

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***Case Example: The Work of Acceptance***

- She allowed herself to honor all that she felt as a legitimate response to her parents' behavior.
- She recognized what it was about her parents' personalities that led them to act the way they did.
- She gave up expecting or yearning for more than they could give her.
- Unwilling to pretend that their rigid behavior didn't matter, she refused to grant them Cheap Forgiveness. Unwilling to spend her life sparring with them, she refused to succumb to Not Forgiving.

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***Case Example: The Work of Acceptance***

- She worked at limiting her preoccupation with how they hurt her, and actively reached out to others who made her feel loved and respected.
- She gave up her need to forgive her parents, and arrived at the healing, self-affirming position of Acceptance.

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***Behaviors for Which Hurt Parties Need to Forgive Themselves***

- For dismissing their suffering and failing to appreciate how deeply they've been wounded.
- For believing they got what they deserve.
- For allowing the mistreatment to shatter and shame them.
- For refusing to forgive themselves, even when they're innocent.
- For making peace at any cost, no matter how unsafe or miserable the offender makes them feel.
- For losing time and energy in imaginary, vindictive dialogue with the offender.

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***Acceptance helps hurt parties to***

- place a premium on their own health and clear their head of emotional poison
- be true to themselves and honor the full force of the violation
- overcome fantasies of revenge while seeking a just resolution
- ensure their emotional and physical safety
- restore and integrate their valued selves

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***Acceptance helps the hurt parties to***

- see themselves and the offender with objectivity, honesty, and equanimity
- forge a relationship with the offender that satisfies their personal goals, and
- forgive themselves for their own failings that caused them harm

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***The Interpersonal Core of Genuine Forgiveness***

- Genuine Forgiveness is a transaction.
- Genuine Forgiveness is conditional.
- Genuine Forgiveness requires a transfer of vigilance.

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***What is Genuine Forgiveness?***

- Genuine Forgiveness is a hard-won transaction, an intimate dance between two people bound together by interpersonal violation.
- As the offender works hard to earn forgiveness through genuine, generous acts of repentance and restitution, the hurt party works hard to let go of her resentment and her need for retribution.
- Together they redress the injury.

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***What Offenders Must Do to Earn Genuine Forgiveness***

1. Look at their mistaken assumptions about forgiveness and see how these assumptions block their efforts to earn it.
2. Bear witness to the pain they caused.
3. Apologize genuinely, non-defensively, responsibly.
4. Seek to understand their behavior and reveal the inglorious truth about themselves to the person they harmed.
5. Work to earn back trust.
6. Forgive themselves for injuring another person.

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***Mistaken Assumptions About Forgiveness That May Block an Offender's Efforts to Earn It***

1. I can't begin to earn forgiveness until I feel perfectly safe, comfortable, and ready.
2. I deserve to be forgiven.
3. If I admit I was wrong and work to earn your forgiveness, I will seem weak and vulnerable in your eyes and mine.
4. I'm not worthy of your forgiveness.
5. Nothing can undo the wrong I've done.
6. When I seek your forgiveness, I admit I'm a bad person.

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***Mistaken Assumptions About Forgiveness  
That May Block an Offender's Efforts to Earn It***

7. You'll never forgive me, so why should I try?
8. You should know I'm sorry.
9. If I work to earn forgiveness, I'm saying, "I'm the only one who did wrong."
10. It makes no sense to try to earn forgiveness if I don't intend to have an ongoing relationship with you.

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***The Offender Bears Witness to the Pain He Caused***

- He encourages the person he hurt to share her pain.
- He initiates discussion about the injury.
- He listens to her pain with an open heart.

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***What Makes for a Good Apology?***

*Offenders*

- Take responsibility for the damage they caused
- Make their apology personal
- Make their apology specific
- Make their apology deep
- Make their apology heartfelt
- Make their apology clean
- Apologize repeatedly

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***Examples of Bad Apologies***

- The two-second apology:
  - “Sorry.”
- The sanitized apology:
  - “I’m sorry for whatever I did wrong.”
- The shirk responsibility apology:
  - “I’m sorry if I hurt your feelings.”
- The lack of ownership apology:
  - “I’m sorry your feelings are hurt.”
- The perfunctory apology:
  - “As I’ve said before, I’m sorry.”

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***Examples of Bad Apologies***

- The vindictive apology:
  - “I’ll show you what it means to be sorry.”
- The grudging apology:
  - “I said I was sorry. What else do you want?”
- The expedient apology:
  - “I know I’m in the doghouse unless I say I’m sorry, so here it is.”
- The yes...but, blame-deflecting apology:
  - “I’m sorry I did X, but you’re no Mother Theresa either.”
- The “Oh, what the hell” apology:
  - “Heh, I’m sorry, pal.”

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***Examples of Bad Apologies***

- The obsequious apology:
  - “I’m so sorry, I’m so sorry, I’m so sorry (but don’t ask me why).”
- The contemptuous apology:
  - “I’m sorry for stepping on your big, fat ego.”
- The exaggerated, manipulative apology:
  - “I hate myself for what I did. Can you ever, ever forgive me?”
- The guilt-inducing apology:
  - “Do you really need me to apologize for that?”

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***Questions to Help Offenders Explore Their Offensive Behavior***

- What allowed me to violate another person’s rights – to treat that person without respect or value?
- What was I thinking? Was I thinking?
- How did I justify what I did? How did I give myself permission to act the way I did?
- What do I learn about myself from this? What was my behavior about? What am I about?

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***Other Trust-Building Behaviors***

*Offenders can*

- Explore their childhood wounds in therapy and write the hurt party a letter revealing what they learn about themselves and their present-day behavior.
- Acknowledge the truth of the hurt party’s accusations both to her and to those who matter to her.
- Respect her need to distance herself from him.
- Resist the urge to pressure her to forgive him.

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***Approaches to Self-Forgiveness***

*Offenders may*

- Refuse to forgive themselves.
- Forgive themselves too easily (Cheap Self-forgiveness).
- Forgive themselves after taking responsibility for their actions, but without making amends to the person they harmed.
- Forgive themselves, but only after taking responsibility for their actions and making amends.

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***A Model for Earning Self-Forgiveness***

Stage 1: Self-confrontation

Stage 2: Self-appraisal

Stage 3: Self-compassion

Stage 4: Self-transformation

Stage 5: Self-integration

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***What Hurt Parties Must Do to Grant Forgiveness***

1. Look at their mistaken assumptions about forgiveness and see how these assumptions stop them from granting it.
2. Complete the steps of Acceptance – not alone, but with the offender’s help.
3. Create opportunities for the offender to make good and help them heal.

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***Mistaken Assumptions about Forgiveness That May Stop Hurt Parties from Granting It***

- I can’t enter into the process of forgiving until I feel perfectly safe, comfortable, and ready.
- Forgiveness is a unilateral pardon. I shouldn’t ask for anything in return.
- Forgiveness happens immediately.
- Forgiveness is perfect and complete.
- When I forgive, I relinquish all negative feelings toward the offender.

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***Mistaken Assumptions about Forgiveness  
That May Stop Hurt Parties from Granting It***

- When I forgive, I admit that my anger toward the offender was exaggerated or unjustified.
- When I forgive, I empower the offender and make myself weak and vulnerable.
- Forgiveness means reconciliation.

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***Examples of How the Offender Can Help the Hurt Party Complete the Steps of Acceptance***

- The offender helps her honor the full sweep of her emotions.
- The offender helps her give up her need for revenge, but not her need for a just resolution.
- The offender helps her stop obsessing about the injury and reengage with life.
- The offender helps protect her from further abuse.

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***Examples of How the Offender Can Help the Hurt Party Complete the Steps of Acceptance***

- The offender helps the hurt party frame his behavior in terms of his own personal struggles.
- The offender helps the hurt party reconcile.
- The offender helps the hurt party forgive herself for her failings.

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***The Hurt Party Creates Opportunities for the Offender to Make Good and Help Her Heal***

- She opens herself up and shares her pain with him.
- She speaks from the soft underbelly of her pain.
- She helps him locate her pain and tells him exactly what she needs to heal.
- She allows him to make reparations.
- She lets him know what he's doing right.
- She apologizes for her contribution to the injury.

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***The Hurt Party Encourages the Offender When He***

- bears witness to her pain and listens with an open heart
- apologizes generously, genuinely, responsibly
- reflects on the origin and meaning of his behavior
- works to rebuild trust

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### **FORGIVENESS EXERCISE**

1. Write down the name of someone who has hurt you in a significant way.
2. What has this person done to hurt you?
3. What has this person done to heal you?
4. Have you forgiven this person? Yes or no? Why or why not?
5. What else would this person need to do (assuming he or she is capable) to do to earn your forgiveness?
6. What have you done to make peace with yourself and come to terms with the injury?
7. What else could you do to foster the forgiveness process with this person?