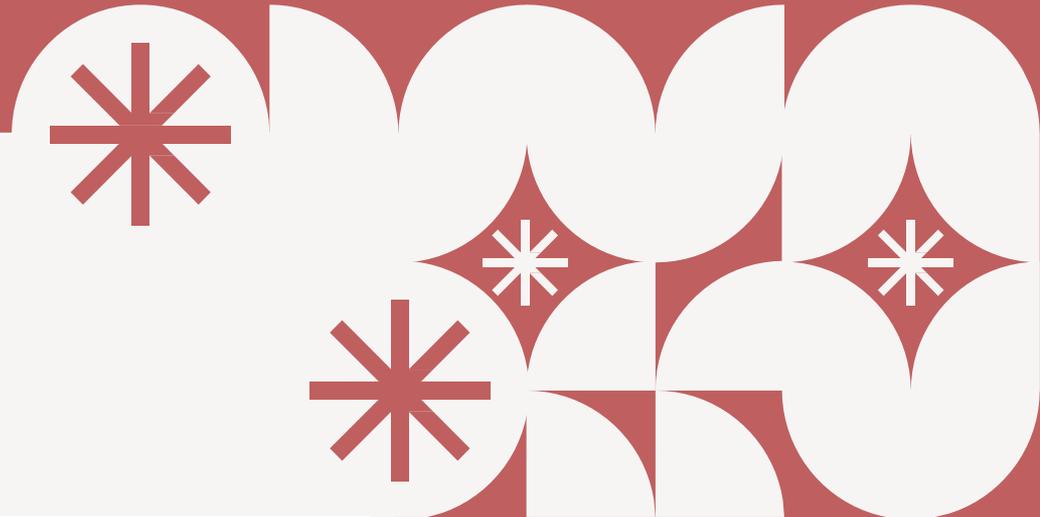


Innovations: Accomplishing Forgiveness Education in 30-days, a report from the United States. Forgiveness Education with At-risk Adolescents.

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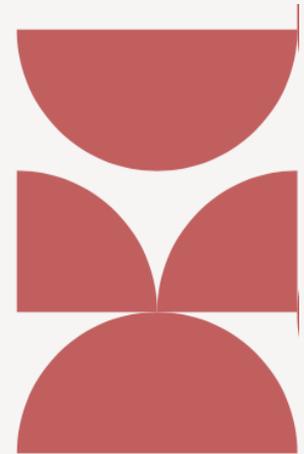
Subjects: At-risk adolescents attending an alternative high school

- **Goal of Forgiveness Education:**

- To work with students who had anger issues and teach them a different way of responding to their anger and hurt feelings.

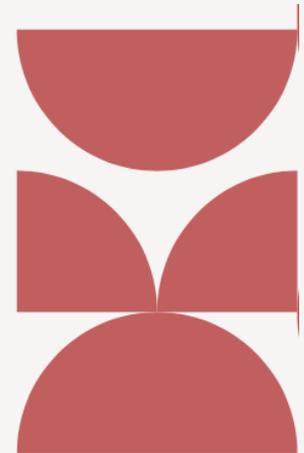
- **Quotes from students post education:**

- “Never shared my hurt and anger before; learning how to forgive and that it is an option”
- ”Realizing that anger and obsessing over offender is a waste of time”
- “Being able to better communicate feelings toward my dad”



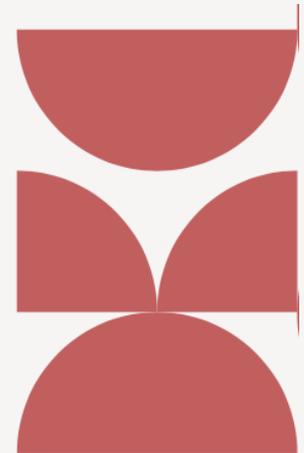
Subjects: At-risk adolescents attending an alternative high school

- Most forgiveness education and intervention had been conducted with adults.
 - According to Sim (2003), literature on forgiveness in the adolescent population was limited and inadequate.
- As a developmental psychologist, I wanted to work with students in school who were carrying around anger and were cognitively and morally mature enough to understand forgiveness.
- For forgiveness to occur, individuals must be able to move beyond egocentrism and acknowledge the perspectives of others.



Adolescents can Benefit from Encouragement to Forgive

- Although adolescents are developmentally prepared to give and receive forgiveness, this population needs education about what it really means to forgive and how to forgive.
- Enright, Santos, and Al-Mabuk (1989) developed a model of forgiveness and found that adolescents were **Stage 3 forgivers, labeled Expectational Forgiveness.**
- Teachers, religious leaders, authority figures, and peers can greatly impact teenagers' willingness and/or ability to forgive.

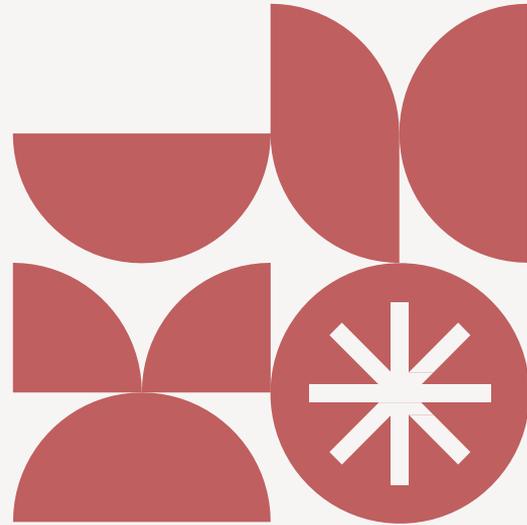


Almost all the participants in this study had one of the following:

- A parent, relative, or significant other in jail
- A child or were pregnant
- A parent or stepparent who was either a drug user, drug dealer, recovering alcoholic or a drug addict
- Were either physically, sexually, or emotionally abused by a parental figure.
- Experiencing some type of hurt by a parent or significant other.
- If female, were involved in an abusive relationship with a man.

How Anger Affects Student Learning in the Classroom

- Chronic anger interferes with student's ability to learn and may result in academic failure.
- Anger-related problems are among the most common reasons for referral to the school and mental health counselor.
- Anger issues often lead to cutting school and increased absences.
- Anger causes increased violence and aggressive acts at school, on other students and school personnel.



Intervention Procedure

Actual Intervention

- **7 weeks in duration**
- **Daily sessions**
 - 42 minutes for 4 days a week, and 30 minutes for one day a week
- **31 sessions total** - 30- 42 minutes per session
- Approximately **23** hours of education

Initial ideas for intervention based on previous research

- **16 weeks in duration**
 - Once a week for 90 minute
- **16 sessions total**
- Approximately **24** hours of education

What are the Benefits of Daily Forgiveness Education?

- With daily lessons students were able to **recall** information from one day to the next.
- Students and educator were able to get to know each other more easily and form a trusted relationship in less time
- Time on Task and Focus was better with daily lessons
- Worked best with the school schedule

Goal of Forgiveness Education: Make the Decision to Forgive

- Given the short duration of the educational intervention and the deep hurt experienced by participants, the purpose of the group ultimately became one of **“Making the Decision to Consider Forgiveness as an Alternative to Revenge”**
- Students made the **commitment** to forgive one’s offender eventually.

Methods- Subjects

Forgiveness Education Class

(Experimental Group)

- **10 Subjects** - All Female:
 - -8 Caucasian, 2 Hispanic
- **Age Range:**
 - - 15 to 19
- **Average age:**
 - 17.2 years
- Three students in 10th grade, four in 11th grade, and three seniors.

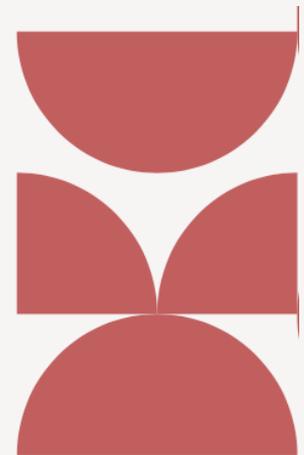
Personal Communication Class

(Control Group)

- **11 Subjects** - 9 Females, 2 Males
 - **Females:** 6 Caucasian, 3 African-Americans
 - **Males:** 2 Caucasian
- **Age Range:**
 - 16 to 19
- **Average age:**
 - 17.4 years
- Two in students in 10th grade, four in 11th grade, and five seniors.

Adolescents had misconceptions and skepticism about forgiveness:

- Gassin (1998) explains that given the moral betrayal involved in the types of offenses some adolescents experience, along with the adolescents' developing concept of justice, it is not surprising that **adolescents hold a lot of anger and hurt toward their offender.**
- Adolescents also felt ambivalent about the idea of forgiveness.
- Forgiveness was equated with absolving the offender, reconciliation, and lack of recognition of anger's role in the process.



Experimental Group's Description of Hurts:

Six students reported experiencing a “great deal of hurt”, three students “much hurt” and one student, “some hurt”.

- Sexually abused by uncle from the age of 4 to 11.
- Parents divorced and most of the blame was pointed at me.
- Parents divorced and dad and I hate each other.
- Dad told me he did not love me and did not want anything to do with me, he disowned me.
- Dad spent all family's money on drugs and then left family for several years. At age 10 he saw us for a little while and then stopped contact. I had not heard from him until I had my baby.
- I was raped by 3 men and got pregnant.
- My boyfriend lied to me and cheated on me.
- Mom's ex-boyfriend hurt our family physically and mentally.
- Boyfriend put me down and calls me names.

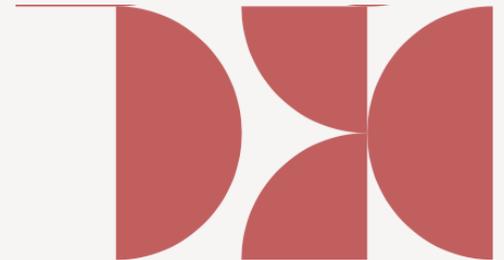
Control Group's Description of Hurts:

Six students reported experiencing a “Great deal of hurt”, four students “much hurt” and one student, “some hurt”.

- I slept with someone who was HIV positive and was not told about it.
- Step-mom treats me very unfairly. Does everything possible to get rid of me and keep me away from my mom. She steals from me and her kids steal my clothes.
- My sister stole money from me and lied about it when I asked her.
- My baby's father told me he did not want to be in our lives anymore. He did not want to call a mistake his child.
- Step-dad yelled at me and my friend when he was drunk and almost hit me. Mom yelled at me for sticking up for myself.
- Boyfriend cheated on me and I fought the girl.

Control Group's Description of Hurts (cont.)

- Mom cut off all contact like I don't exist.
- Mom got into drugs and went into prison a few times.
- Person has hurt me my whole life by hating me, kicking me out, chasing me down the road, etc.
- When I was 13, my mom went to jail for 4 years and my dad and grandmom took care of us.



Instruments

- Enright Forgiveness Inventory (Attitude Scale)
 - This 60-item scale was used to measure the degree to which the person forgave their offender.
 - Each participant was asked to consider the one who offended him or her and rate that person on the basis of one's current emotions (20 items), cognitions (20 items), and behaviors (20 items).
 - Sample items - "I do not feel bitter toward the person" (absence of negative emotions), "I do not view the person as below me" (absence of negative cognitions), and "I feel close to the person" (presence of positive emotions).

Instruments (cont.)

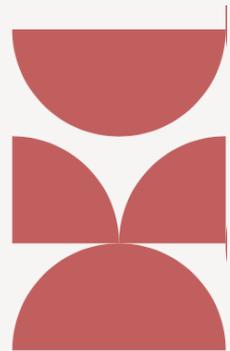
- The State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (1983)
- Reynolds Adolescent Depression Scale (1961)
- Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory
- Hope Scale- developed by Enright & Al-Mabuk (1989)
assesses optimism toward the future in areas of parental relationships, friendship, achievement, and affect.
- Post-intervention screening interview- including assessment of whether forgiveness has occurred.

Intervention Procedure Included:

- Three days of pre-testing in group setting
- One day of introductory ice breaker exercises, including name game- **Two Truths and A Lie**
- Intervention based on **Enright's (2001) 20-unit process model of forgiveness** – developmentally modified for adolescents.
- Participants given the book *Forgiveness is a choice* by Robert Enright (2001).

Intervention Procedure (cont.)

- Forgiveness education was loosely based on curriculum developed by Enright and the Human Development Study Group (1991) and used in a previous study, “**Forgiveness Within the Family**”.
- Education was divided into 5 themes which were grouped to address the 20 units in the Forgiveness process model (Enright, 2001).
 - **Lesson 1-** Anger to Hope
 - **Lesson 2-** Decide to Forgive
 - **Lesson 3-** See with New Eyes
 - **Lesson 4-** Soften Your Heart
 - **Lesson 5-** Soak up the Pain

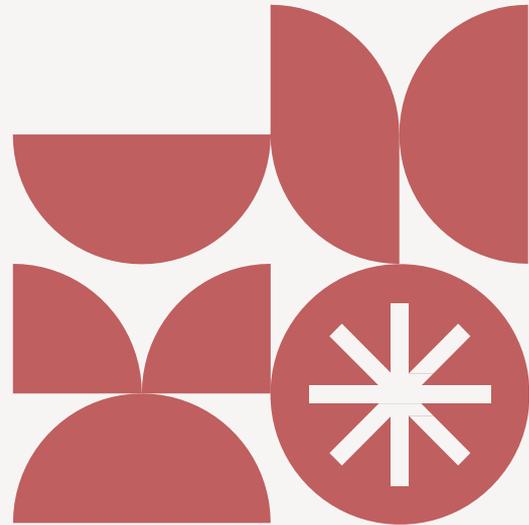


Lessons were Accomplished by:

- **Didactic Instruction**
- **Discussion**
 - Small and large group discussion, worked in pairs
- **Activities** about anger and how students usually respond to anger
 - Ways of coping, future goals and where students want to be in five and 10 years
- **Reflective Writing and journaling**
 - What do you like about yourself- issues surrounding shame and self-esteem
- **Film**
 - Dead Man Walking
- **Dr. Seuss book**
 - Horton Hears a Who
- **Two written cases studies read in class**
 - Illustrated the units in the forgiveness model and relatable to students
- **Video clip from Dateline** illustrating a woman who forgave the man who killed her husband and 16 year-old daughter in a drunk driving accident.

- This lesson involved identifying the destructive nature of prolonged Anger and encouraging participants to learn to make the pain constructive.
- Students spent a lot of time discussing anger and its role in the forgiveness process. Students benefited by learning how to “take care” of their anger as one student put it and that anger is a normal and natural feeling.
- Expressed feelings related to being hurt and coping mechanisms used to deal with hurt.

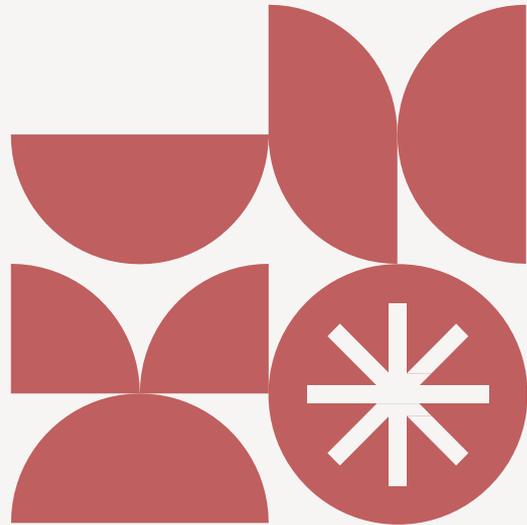
Lesson 1- Anger to Hope



Example of Specific Activity that helped students recognize their feelings:

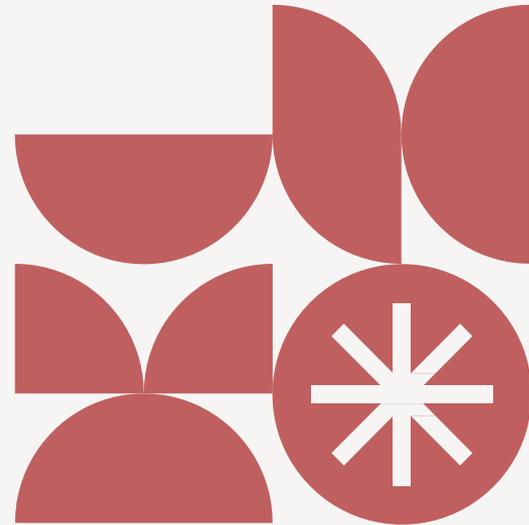
- Fitzgibbons explains, “Significant numbers of people in our society do not know how to deal appropriately with their anger” (1986, p. 629).
- One activity that helped students get in touch with their feelings like sadness, disappointment, and anger involved brainstorming the feelings associated with what they had experienced and how they had been coping thus far.

Lesson 1- Anger to Hope



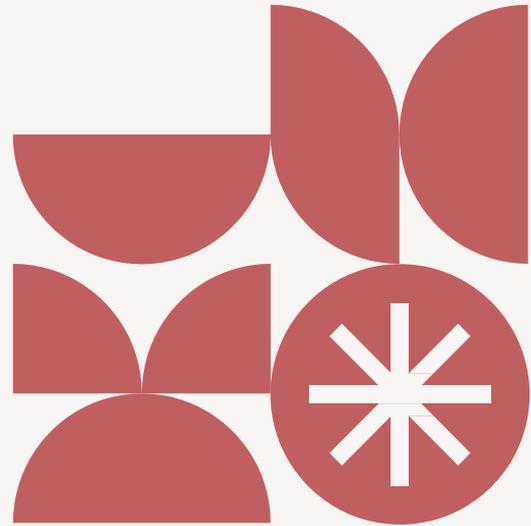
- Knowing that they could do something with their anger, gave students **hope for the future.**
- Example- One student remarked that working on the process of forgiveness gave her hope for a better life than her mother had.
- This student listed the following as advantages of giving up anger and other negative feelings:
 - Improved mood, physical well-being and basic outlook on life
 - Better relationships
 - Increased inner peace
 - emotional maturity
 - Decreased anxiety and fear.

Lesson 1- Anger to Hope



- Talking about feelings in class helped students process them without becoming overwhelmed.
- One student remarked how good it felt to let go of her negative feelings. She described the process as a wall that had been built around her gradually coming down brick by brick.

Lesson 1- Anger to Hope

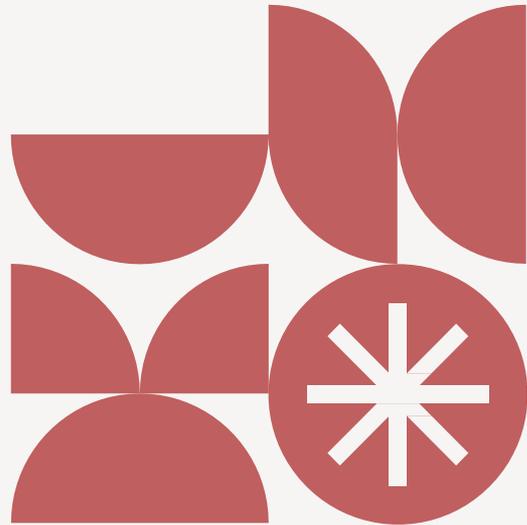


Introduction to Forgiveness

- Discussion of **What Forgiveness Is and Is Not.**
- Emphasis on distinguishing between Forgiveness and Reconciliation.
- Communication that forgiveness is not the same as forgetting.
- Idea that one does not have to receive an apology from the offender to forgive generated a lot of discussion and was helpful for the students.
- Justice can occur alongside forgiveness

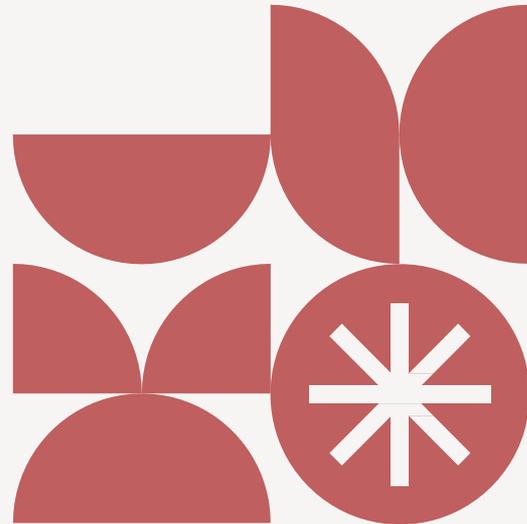
- Presented Forgiveness as one way to end Destructive Anger and **encouraged** participants to consider forgiveness as an option.
- Lesson also called for the forswearing of Revenge- Problematic for students who live by the motto “An Eye for an Eye”.
- Students had been schooled by parents to, “Don’t start anything, but if someone starts with you, definitely get back at them”.

Lesson 2- Decide to Forgive



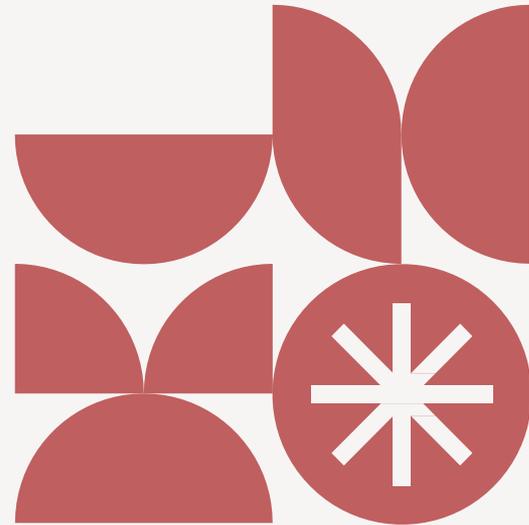
- Prior to reviewing the four phases in Enright's 20-unit model, students **developed their own models** of how they thought forgiveness occurred.
- Students were surprised to learn that the process of forgiveness had so many steps and appreciated learning that **forgiveness is a choice** and something that took time and effort.
- Knowing what forgiveness is and is not helped students want to learn more about forgiveness and make the decision to forgive.

Lesson 2-Review of Model of Forgiveness



- In this lesson, the focus turned toward **Reframing one's perception of the offender as a Human Being**, rather than simply the person who committed the offense.
- This lesson encouraged participants to see their offender as part of a more complete picture, and to see the vulnerabilities in the offender that may have led to the offense, not to excuse the offender's actions but to better understand them.

Lesson 3- See with New Eyes



Concepts of Unconditionality and Inherent Worth

- **Unconditionality**

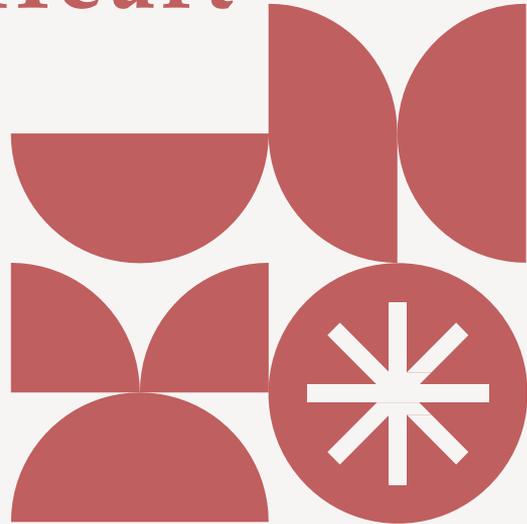
- Understanding that all persons are equal at some level, regardless of personal characteristics.

- **Inherent Worth**

- All people are worthy and deserve respect regardless of their actions.
- These concepts were extremely difficult for students to understand.
- The Dr. Seuss book, **Horton Hears a Who**, was read aloud in class to help students realize that no matter one's size, appearance, etc., she or he still has worth.

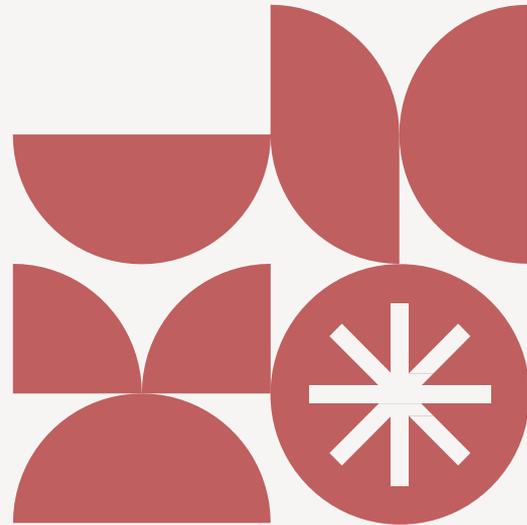
- Lesson dealt with learning to empathize with the offender by understanding his or her pain.
- Goal was to feel compassion for the offender and work toward decreasing negative feelings and thoughts.

Lesson 4- Soften Your Heart

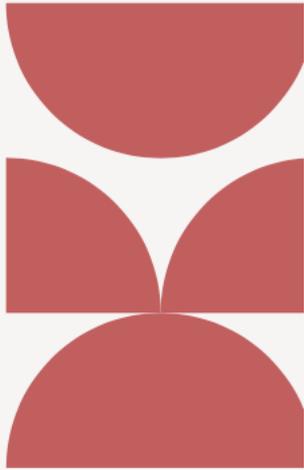


- This lesson taught participants to absorb and feel their own pain rather than passing it on to others or remain stuck in the pain.
- Lesson also emphasized gift like quality of forgiveness.
- Students realized that by absorbing their pain they could stop their hurt from negatively affecting others.

Lesson 5- Soak up the Pain – We ran out of time for the last units in the model.



Results

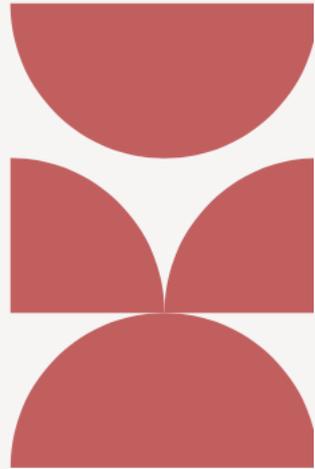


- Statistical Significance was demonstrated on all the measures **except self-esteem**.
- Thus, the Experimental group (Forgiveness education group) showed:
 - A significantly greater reduction in Anxiety, State Anxiety, Trait Anxiety, and Depression
 - A greater increase in Forgiveness toward the offender and in feelings of Hope compared to the Control group (personal communication class).

Results: Descriptive Statistics for the Dependent Variables

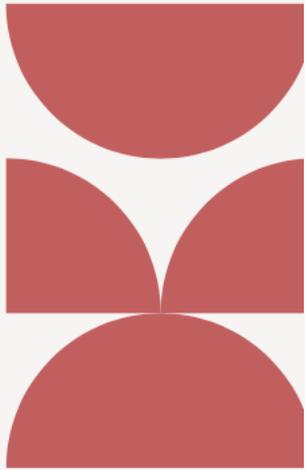
Dependent Variable	Experimental Group		Control Group	
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest
Enright Forgiveness Inventory	188 (84.6)	285.3 (62.5)	169.7 (69.9)	175.1(70.3)
Anxiety Scale	91.6 (27.3)	70.0 (21.1)	93.0 (17.0)	93.8 (15.3)
State Anxiety Subscale	45.0 (15.7)	32.9 (10.8)	48.3 (12.6)	48.4 (8.8)
Trait Anxiety Subscale	46.6 (12.4)	37.1 (10.7)	44.6 (7.7)	45.3 (10.9)
Hope Scale	90.3 (18.8)	120.1 (14.3)	106. 2 (11.6)	109.7 (13.0)
Self-Esteem Scale	50.0 (26.2)	67.6 (20.6)	59.2 (20.0)	66.1 (21.4)
Depression Scale	71.8 (18.7)	52.2 (16.6)	68.6 (11.4)	69.2 (12.8)

Results



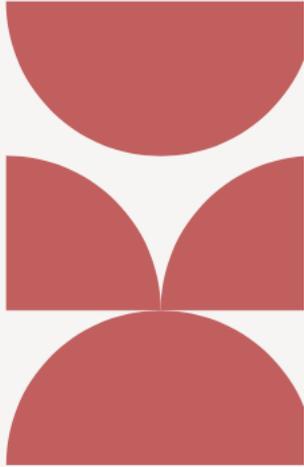
- Effect size for the experimental group on the forgiveness measure was **1.83** – **scores increased on average almost 100 points.**
- Effect size for the experimental group for overall anxiety was **1.58** – illustrating a large decrease compared to the control group. Both state and trait anxiety decreased.
- Effect size for **Depression** was 1.39 – Forgiveness education can be a potential effective intervention to help prevent and decrease depression.
- Effect size for **Hope** was 1.28 – “It has been hard to give up my identity of being angry and feeling sorry for myself. Forgiveness in the future can help me”.
- Although changes in self-esteem were not significant, they were in the expected direction. Longer education/intervention may be needed for changes to occur in self-esteem.

Qualitative Results



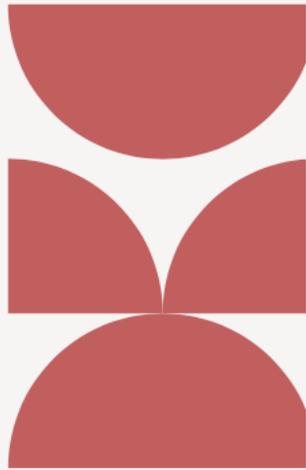
- Students were asked
 - “Is forgiving a goal for you?”
- All 10 students in the forgiveness education group reported that forgiveness was a goal for them post-intervention.

Qualitative Results



- Students were asked, “What has been most helpful in this course to you?”
 - Seven students reported that learning about the negative effects of anger and how to let go of anger was the most helpful.
 - Three students mentioned perspective-taking and putting themselves in their offenders’ shoes.
 - Four students shared that gaining a better understanding of forgiveness and learning about forgiveness as an option was helpful.
 - Two students reported enjoying reading the book, *Forgiveness is A Choice*.

Qualitative Results



- **Conceptual knowledge** and understanding increased as a result of the forgiveness education.
- **Students' definitions** of forgiveness also changed as a result of the forgiveness education.
- Post education students illustrated a **greater recognition of anger's role in the forgiveness process**, that one does not need an apology to forgive, that forgiveness does not automatically lead to reconciliation, and that forgiveness benefits the forgiver as well as the offender.

Post Individual Interview Specific Responses

- “Learning about forgiveness and that it is an option, learning that holding onto anger makes it worse”
- "Having people to talk to, knowing you can forgive someone even if person does not apologize, lets off a lot of stress”
- "Before class, hated the injurers and men in general. Now not as angry and close to forgiving”
- "I learned ways to relieve anger instead of doing what I did before”

Post-Individual Interview Specific Responses

- “I learned that it is not good to hold grudges all the time. I learned to think about what the other person has to say”
- "Different things you can do to get rid of your anger”
- "Teach me to forgive and move on in my life. I won't have so much anger toward mom and will be much happier”
- "Knowing that the offender was hurt as well. Realizing that I am not the only one who has a lot of pain”
- "Learning about forgiveness and that it is easier to forgive than hold onto all of the anger”
- “Forgive yourself for doing the drugs and then you can accept yourself and forgive others”

Limitations

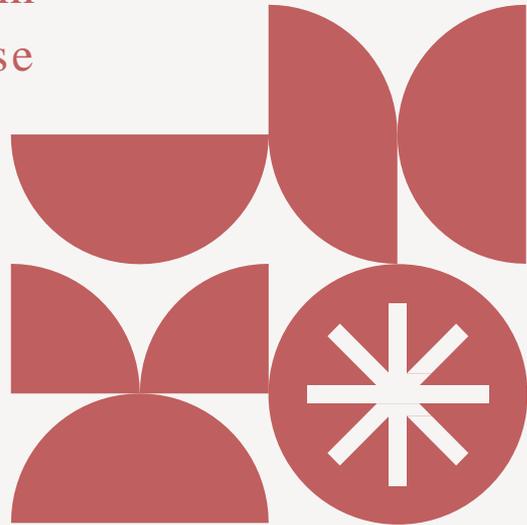
- Students did not have time to process feelings after forgiveness education.
 - Students went to math class after talking about being raped or mom's drug use and neglect.
- Students most likely held feelings back and did not get as intensely involved because of the structure of the forgiveness education being in the middle of the day.
 - For example, one student dropped out of the forgiveness class because she was not ready to deal with her feelings.

Limitations (cont.)

- One major limitation was that some adolescents were still being hurt by the person they were trying to forgive or another person. Children and adolescents cannot always be removed from the offender.
- Example quote:
 - “I can’t talk about a specific hurt from my mother because it is ongoing. My mother is totally unsupportive of me. She constantly nags me and is verbally and emotionally abusive. She calls me ugly and fat all the time and says that she wished she never had me and that she doesn’t love me”. (initial individual interview)

Limitations (cont.)

- It is not possible to forgive until one is safe, not being hurt and ideally, has had some time from the last abusive incident. This was not the case for some of the adolescents in the forgiveness intervention.
- Small sample size.
- One forgiveness educator.



Limitations (cont.)

- Group mentality
 - Students were influenced by each other in both positive and negative ways.
 - Some students had more difficulty with certain concepts and other students were ready to move on in the 20-unit model but were held back by the students who were not as ready.
- Students may not have been as willing to buy into the concept of forgiveness if other students were strongly critical about the idea of forgiving.
- Intervention duration was too short. We did not make it through the complete curriculum. Students needed more time to process their feelings and understand the concepts related to forgiveness.
- Individual sessions in addition to the group education may have been beneficial.

Conclusions

- Results illustrate how forgiveness education may be beneficial for at-risk adolescents, as well as other children and adolescents.
- Students in my college class on Interpersonal Forgiveness frequently remark that they wish they had learned about forgiveness earlier.
- This study illustrated that forgiveness education was effective in increasing forgiveness toward an offender and increasing psychological well-being for this population.
- Results are encouraging and need to be replicated with additional populations of adolescents using different intervention designs and forgiveness education curriculum.
- Giving children and adolescents opportunities to think about forgiveness is beneficial. Reflection will allow a deeper understanding of forgiveness to develop. Adolescents need to know that forgiveness is an option.
- Adolescents need to be educated about Forgiveness and how it is in their power to choose to forgive.

Thank You!

- For more information about this research please refer to:
Freedman, S. (2018). Forgiveness as an educational goal with at-risk adolescents. *Journal of Moral Education*, DOI:10.1080/03057240.2017.1399869

Freedman, S. (2008). Forgiveness education with at-risk adolescents: A case study analysis. In W. Malcolm, N. DeCourville, & K. Belicki (Eds.), *Women's*

- Or e-mail me at freedman@uni.edu with any questions, comments or further discussion.