

For reflection and discussion

- What sayings and situations inhibit the expression of emotions in our society? What are the appropriate expressions of emotions in our culture?
- Feelings are often described as fickle and untrustworthy, but *you can't trust your feelings* is not a reliable statement. Cultures which prefer emotional stability have strong views of what are inappropriate expression of emotions, and often model suppression as a norm.

What is the culture of your circle of friends and family?

What would you like to change?

- *"Emotion is energy seeking expression. Brushed away, sidelined, ignored, actively shoved out of consciousness, these powerful energies must periodically burst forth. For me, this mostly involved being swamped inwardly by waves of exaggerated sentiment, moodiness, anxiety, anger, depression, or over-enthusiastic elation."*

Robert Morris, *Weavings*, xvi(2), 2001, p 8.

12 step process of forgiveness

I need to forgive myself as part of the journey of forgiveness. Forgiveness is not a unique (single or simple) act, but more a kind of inner pilgrimage (to forgive is to find peace in yourself).

- 1 Not to take revenge and to cease offensive actions.** The walk towards forgiveness begins with two decisions: to decide not to revenge, and to stop the offensive situation. There is no point in wanting to forgive if the offensive situation is continuing.
- 2 Recognise our inner wounds.** If we deny and hide the wound, we also cover over the possibility of healing. This person has hurt me/ is hurting me, they have offended me, and I suffer because of this. Denying, minimising or avoiding are defence mechanisms that prevent us from reaching real forgiveness; they hold the energy inside us (headaches, stomach pains, sleeplessness).
- 3 Share our inner wound with someone.** Rather than bear the wound all by ourself, tell the story to someone who will listen and not judge, or moralise or give advice. This allows us to see the situation in a larger perspective. Every telling shares a little more of our pain, while the story also loses a little of its power over us.
- 4 Identify the loss and grieve it.** List all the losses caused by the offence and grieve for what you have lost. Weep, wail, mourn, reminisce.
- 5 Accept the anger and the desire for revenge.** It is natural, but it does not have to push us to destructive actions. Anger is there to express the need for justice; we need to fully imagine vengeance in images. Slowly the images will go.
- 6 Forgive ourself.** We feel guilt, shame, blame, desire for revenge – these affect our inner harmony and need forgiveness, as do our mistakes. To forgive ourself is the first condition allowing us to forgive others.

- 7 ***Understand our offender.*** Put aside blame and place ourself in the other's place - imagine their suffering, realising what they did is irreversible. Recognize their value as a human being; accept their mystery.
- 8 ***Find some meaning for the offence in our life.*** With time we might see some positive value or meaning to what happened. But this cannot be felt straight after the event.
- 9 ***Know that we are worthy of forgiveness and already forgiven.*** Each of us has been forgiven many times; forgiveness gives us dignity and a sense of value. For those who accept the idea of a God who forgives, there is the possibility to feel accepted unconditionally.
- 10 ***Stop pursuing forgiveness.*** Forgiveness is not a moral obligation. We cannot demand it from others. Not all people are ready to forgive – they do not respond to pressure. The process needs time and everyone has their own process. Pressure to forgive only adds guilt and builds walls of resistance and resentment.
- 11 ***Open ourselves to the grace to forgive.*** It is not natural, it is beyond comprehension – we don't understand in advance how we will forgive. We often need to call on divine help.
- 12 ***Decide to end the relationship/friendship or renew it.*** If forgiveness leads to reconciliation, it is impossible to meet each other in the way it was before the offence. The relationship will begin on a new basis. Forgiveness may be given and the relationship ends, for different reasons. It is still beneficial for the offended and the offender.

*Adapted from: Rose Poletti, with the collaboration of Barbara Dobbs (no reference, no date).
Used as a handout in the PDWs in Rwanda since 1996.*