

Human beings are imperfect: everyone sometimes acts in ways that have a negative effect on other people or themselves. These wrongdoings might be intentional or unintentional, and can include things that we have done or have failed to do.

If you have done something that goes against your principles, moral beliefs, or values, you might be reacting in one of the following ways.

Blaming yourself

You criticize and punish yourself for your actions. This might seem like a good way to make up for what you have done and show you are sorry...

...but in the long-term, it is likely to have a negative impact on your health, wellbeing, and relationships.

Forgiving yourself

You accept full responsibility for your actions and try to make amends. This can be a slow and uncomfortable process...

...but in the long-term, you're likely to feel much better about yourself (and the person you wronged might feel better too).

Excusing yourself

You protect your self-esteem by denying, justifying, or minimizing your offence, or by blaming others. You might feel better in the short-term...

...but in the long-term, you're unlikely to change your behavior or repair the damage you've caused.

Should I forgive myself?

If you are struggling with regret, or continue to blame yourself for a misdeed, choosing to forgive yourself might be helpful. However, genuine self-forgiveness is more than just 'moving on' or 'brushing aside': it involves taking full responsibility for your actions without justifying them or being too hard on yourself. In the long term, this can help you to reconnect with what matters most to you. Research also shows that self-forgiveness can have a positive impact on your health and relationships.

How do I forgive myself?

If you decide that you want to work toward self-forgiveness, some of the key steps include:

Accepting responsibility

Take ownership of what you have done without being too hard on yourself.

Making things better

Think about the positive actions you can take, like apologizing, asking for forgiveness, or making amends.

Expressing your feelings

Accept and express your feelings about the offense or misdeed.

Planning for the future

Reflect on what you have learned and what you want your life to stand for going forwards.

Other things that can help you forgive yourself include:

Judging your actions rather than your whole character.



Limiting the time you spend dwelling on what happened.



Accepting your imperfections as part of being human.



Treating yourself with care and understanding.



Finding supportive people you can open up to.



When is it unhelpful to forgive yourself?

People sometimes want to forgive themselves for things that are not their fault, such as experiencing abuse. This isn't fair or helpful because they are not responsible for these experiences. Forgiving yourself for harmful things you continue to do (like mistreating others) can also be unhelpful as it might stop you from changing.