

Department of Educational Psychology
University of Wisconsin-Madison
315-506 Current Issues in Educational Psychology
Topic: The Psychology of Forgiveness
3 credits are offered for this course (met by attendance and course assignments)
Course meets from 2:30 to 5:25pm on Tuesdays
Instructional mode: on-line
Canvas Course URL: <https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/209476>
Course requisites: Member of
the Center for Educational Opportunity
Fall 2020

Professor Robert Enright

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Office hours: Usually office hours will be on Mondays from 11am to 1pm. If I have already-scheduled meetings for a given Monday, I will shift the office hours to another day that week.

To access the office hour schedule: 1) go to SignUpGenius.com; 2) click on the search icon on the upper right (find a Sign Up); 3) enter my email address of renright@wisc.edu. The schedule for the fall semester, 2020 will come up. You will need to register/log in before you can sign up for an office hour. The university requires remote meetings this fall semester. At the time of your meeting, please call this phone number: 608-222-0241.

If you need to meet with me and the office hours are full, please email and we will find a time.

Course Description: 315-506 = Influence of educational psychology upon issues and innovations in education. Our focus is on the psychology of forgiveness. Please see the learning goals for this specific course at the end of this syllabus. About half of the class is lecture and about half of the class is learning together with discussion.

Required text:

Enright, R.D. (2019). *Forgiveness is a choice*. Washington, DC: APA Books.

This is available in softcopy and Kindle at amazon.com

There will be videos for discussion and short readings passed out at some of the classes in the second-half of those classes.

CLASS DATE	TOPIC AND READING
9/8	Overview of forgiveness
9/15	Motivation for Forgiving and Defining Important Terms (Chapters 1 and 2, Forgiveness Is a Choice)
9/22	Some Consequences of Unhealthy Anger (Chapter 3, Forgiveness Is a Choice)
9/29	Cross-cultural approaches to forgiveness
10/6	Overview of a Pathway to Forgiving (Chapter 4, Forgiveness Is a Choice)
10/13	Beginning to Forgive by Confronting Anger and Pain (Chapters 5 and 6)
10/20	Committing to Forgive (Chapter 7, Forgiveness Is a Choice)
10/27	Gaining Perspective on the One Who Was (and Perhaps Is) Unfair (Chapter 8, Forgiveness Is a Choice)
11/3	Building Positive Feelings, Thoughts, and Behaviors in Forgiving (Chapter 9, Forgiveness Is a Choice)
11/10	Experiencing Discovery and Release from an Emotional Prison (Chapter 10, Forgiveness Is a Choice)
11/17	More Questions to Help in the Forgiveness Process (Chapter 12, Forgiveness Is a Choice)
11/24	No class for Thanksgiving week
12/01	Seeking Forgiveness (Chapters 14, Forgiveness Is a Choice) and Reconciliation (Chapter 15, Forgiveness Is a Choice)
12/4	Third essay is due. Please note that this is a Friday.
12/8	Helping Children to Forgive (Chapter 13, Forgiveness Is a Choice)

Course Requirements

Attendance for the class is required. Attendance will be taken through WebEx or Zoom. To receive a grade of A in the course, you cannot have more than two unexcused absences. To receive a grade of B in the course, you cannot have more than three unexcused absences. To receive a grade of C in the course, you cannot have more than four unexcused absences.

There are 13 class periods. From Class 2 (September 15) through Class 13 (December 8), you will be expected to hand in a question or a comment specifically focused on the reading to be discussed for that day (the exception is 9/29 because there is no reading before that class).

Please email to me the night before any given class (by the Monday evening before the class) a question or comment regarding something in the reading for the next day that might have confused you or something with which you disagree or something that got you to think more deeply, beyond the description in the text. I will be using these comments/questions as part of the class discussion for that week. I will keep all comments/questions anonymous if or when I read them to the class.

Three papers of approximately 2-3 pages each (double spaced, and, as an example of font size, Times New Roman 12) are required for the class. You are asked to choose **one question from each** of the following three sections:

Section 1, First one-third of the class: Essay is due no later than October 13

Questions for Chapter 1, Forgiveness Is a Choice (If you choose to answer a question from Chapter 1, please answer only one of the two questions)

1. Are you angry (page 8)? Is anger really at the heart of forgiveness or is something else more central? Perhaps mourning is more of an accurate description of what is buried deep in a person's heart, making forgiveness a reasonable choice. Perhaps it is disappointment. Perhaps it is hatred. What do you think? Has the author stereotyped the human condition by saying that anger underlies the need to forgive? What do you anticipate that the author might say to you in return?

2. "Many people confuse forgiveness with trust.....Forgiveness is not a bargain or a negotiation." (page 10). If you cannot trust a person, why bother with forgiveness? Would it not be better just to walk away from the person whom you do not trust or with whom negotiation seems so impossible? Is it not simpler to walk away? Why even consider the possibility of forgiveness under such circumstances?

Question for Chapter 2, Forgiveness Is a Choice

Please reflect on the following: From pages 31-43, the author poses 14 questions. Of the 14 answers, with which one in particular do you most agree and why? Of the 14 answers, with which one in particular do you disagree and why? Please provide a better solution to the question than the author did.

Question for Chapter 3, Forgiveness Is a Choice

Have a conversation with the author about the “Temporary solutions to temporary anger.” Are the supposedly “temporary” solutions any less effective than forgiveness? What might the author say as a rejoinder to your rebuttal? How would you answer his rejoinder? In conclusion, is forgiveness a potentially more effective way to deal with anger or not?

Question for the Cross-Cultural Approaches to Forgiveness

Please critique the views on cross-cultural expressions of forgiveness. What are some of the strengths and weaknesses of what was discussed? Is forgiveness a universal moral virtue even if there are different behavioral expressions of it, or does even the core of what forgiveness is differ by culture?

Question for Chapter 4, Forgiveness Is a Choice

Are there still stumbling blocks for you with regard to the forgiveness journey? What confuses you? What scares you? What needs to be further clarified for you so that you can begin this journey with some confidence? Are you able, in the paper, to reach some conclusions and clarifications, or do you need the instructor’s help?

Section 2, Middle-third of the class: Essay is due no later than November 10

Question for Chapter 5, Forgiveness Is a Choice

If a person starts the forgiveness process because he or she is hurting emotionally and wishes to reduce that hurt, does this mean that forgiveness is basically a self-focused activity? Please consider the definition of forgiveness in your answer. Please consider how one’s initial motivation might change over time in answering the question.

Question for Chapter 6, Forgiveness Is a Choice

Suppose that a colleague at work comes to you very angry with a friend who betrayed a secret, causing embarrassment. The colleague is concerned because he has been angry for two weeks and just wants to talk about healthy and unhealthy anger. Please write a two-to-three page essay

in which you discuss the differences between healthy and unhealthy anger for the colleague. Please use the checklist of six questions at the beginning of the chapter to discuss the details of unhealthy anger so that the person gets a sense of the complications that can befall a person who was treated unfairly. Please describe some of these complications so that the person can evaluate whether or not he has unhealthy anger.

Question for Chapter 7, Forgiveness Is a Choice

Please write a two-to-three page essay on the following: “Do no harm.” Is this a reasonable way to begin committing to forgiveness, to commit to doing no harm to the one who offended? What does it mean, in subtle ways, to do no harm? How can one protect oneself and still “do no harm” to someone who can behave badly? Finally, is the idea of “do no harm” sufficient to commit to forgiving, or must a person do more? What might this “more” be?

Question for Chapter 8, Forgiveness Is a Choice

Please write a two-to-three page paper in which you take the personal, global, and cosmic (if you wish) perspectives on a person who has hurt you. Try to describe each one and then discuss which was most helpful to you and why.

Question for Chapter 9, Forgiveness Is a Choice

Please discuss the subtleties of accepting the pain and giving a gift. When might accepting the pain spill over to an imbalance of respecting the other and respecting the self? Is this imbalance based on a true/accurate conception of “accepting the pain” or is the imbalance borne out of a misunderstanding of what it means to “accept the pain”? When might giving a gift be an imbalance of the other’s rights and your rights? Does giving the gift have anything to do with rights? What part does mercy play when you give a gift to someone who was unfair to you? Finally, what are some examples of subtle gifts that were not mentioned in the book that might be appropriate to give?

Section 3, Final-third of the class: Essay is due no later than December 4 (Please note that December 4 is a Friday).

Question for Chapter 10, Forgiveness Is a Choice

A colleague at work comes to you very discouraged. She wants to forgive a friend who, a year ago, stopped returning phone calls without any explanation. Despite your colleague’s best efforts, the other person just will not discuss the matter. The colleague is skeptical about forgiveness and simply wants to put the whole thing in the past and “move on.” You suspect that

she harbors unhealthy anger. What would you tell her about the material in Chapter 10 so that she begins to see the consequences of forgiving, to make an informed decision?

Question for Chapter 12, Forgiveness Is a Choice

A total of 11 questions are presented and answered in Chapter 12. Which of the 11 questions has the weakest answer? Why is it weak? Does the author confuse certain terms? Does he not go into enough depth in the answer? Is his conclusion wrong? Please propose a better response to the question. Which of the 11 questions has the strongest answer? Why do you say this? Finally, do you have a 12th question, one not addressed in the chapter? What is your answer to the question?

Question for Chapter 14, Forgiveness Is a Choice

Consider the guideposts for forgiving (page 78) and the guideposts for “wanting to be forgiven” (pages 248-249). What complications can you envision when the person forgiving and the person wanting to be forgiven are on very different points of their respective journeys? For example, presume that the one forgiving is in the first five guideposts of the process and the one wanting to be forgiven is in the final five guideposts of that process. What should the two people know under this circumstance?

Question for Chapter 15, Forgiveness Is a Choice

Suppose that Susan, who wishes to reconcile with Brenda, comes to you for advice on how and when to reconcile. Please discuss with her the central features of reconciliation. Please describe each sufficiently so that she has a clear understanding of each feature. Are there any points not mentioned in the chapter that you would like to discuss with her so that her attempt at reconciliation is as complete and as safe as possible?

Question for Chapter 13, Forgiveness Is a Choice. Note that if you wish to answer this question, you will have to read ahead of schedule because the essay is due before we discuss this chapter in class.

Is it a good or a bad idea to foster a forgiving community within a family context? Please defend your answer. If a friend asked you for advice on setting up her family as a forgiving community, what would be your advice? Should the parents set aside specific times with the children for the purpose of reading stories with forgiving themes? Should the parents handle some of the discipline with a sense of forgiveness? If so, what would that look like? Should the parents consider forgiving people from their family of origin so that resentment does not spill over into this family? What cautions might you have for your friend regarding the family as a forgiving community?

General Question

Have you done the work of forgiving someone who has hurt you deeply and unfairly? As you reflect on the outline on page 78, what work do you still have to do to complete the forgiveness process? Which of the units are the easiest for you? Which are the most difficult? Which are the most important, without which you may consider your forgiveness process to be incomplete?

The Department of Educational Psychology asks that the following be placed onto all syllabi:

Be honest, let me know if you need special arrangements, be respectful of persons (but please do not respect any and all ideas just because they are professed in class; this is my addition, not part of Ed Psych), learning goals: 1) to be able to think; 2) to critique ideas, create ideas, reject ideas that seem unimportant, and accept ideas that are important to you; 3) to learn what the idea of forgiveness is, how forgiveness develops in people, variations in people's appropriation of forgiveness, and what the consequences of forgiving are for individuals, relationships, and communities. Forgiveness education with children and adolescents is discussed as an extension of the earlier research with adults.

The university has asked that we include the following:

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES STATEMENT

The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform me of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. I will work either directly with you or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA. (See: [McBurney Disability Resource Center](#))

My own views on the above: Is it time to find a word other than disability? How about challenged or differently challenged?

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION STATEMENT

[Diversity](#) is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background – people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world.