

The Following material is a handout from:

"Medical Mistakes And Self-Forgiveness Revisited: How To Do It--How To Teach It." Seminar. 37<sup>th</sup> Annual STFM Spring Conference, Toronto, ON. May 15, 2004. Please use the self-reflection worksheet and the other materials as needed. I invite reflections and comments on this site. Please share your stories and insights. Marian Stuart

## **Medical Mistakes and Self-Forgiveness Revisited: How To Do It--How to Teach it**

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Research documents the ubiquitous nature of medical mistakes, and that not all bad outcomes are the result of errors. The **goal** of this seminar is to heighten your awareness of the healing power inherent in exploring clinical mistakes with the intent of coming to self-forgiveness.

The potential for personal growth and learning can be enhanced through reflecting honestly on both the process and outcome of actions that lead to regrettable incidents. In this session, a structured process for learning and teaching self-forgiveness will be modeled and practiced. You are invited to use our materials to replicate this seminar in your home setting.

**Objectives:** By the end of the seminar you will be able to:

- 1 Explain the inevitability of medical mistakes and their impact on professional development and the lives of others.
- 2 Discuss how self-forgiveness is necessary to get beyond traumatic incidents and grow from the experience.
3. Use and teach a structured process for achieving self-forgiveness as a practical tool in clinical practice.

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## **Self Reflection Work Sheet**

Think about your most disturbing medical error. Briefly, what was the nature of the mistake?

List the emotions you felt after you became aware of the mistake and its consequences.

What was the impact on others?

In retrospect, how might this have been prevented?

## **How to Give Yourself a Gift of Forgiveness\***

1. Try to identify the hurt (loss of love or sense of being lovable, loss of self-esteem, loss of control or influence).
2. Confront the one who injured you (actually or using imagery).
3. Come to some understanding of *why* this came to pass. Put yourself in the other's shoes and/or yours at the time of the incident.
4. Dialogue taking both sides.
5. Make a decision to forgive. Take a leap of faith.
6. Totally let go of your pain and resentment.

\*Coleman, P.W. The process of forgiveness in marriage and the family. In Enright, R.D. & North, J. *Exploring Forgiveness*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998, pp. 75-93.

## **How to Give the Gift of Self-Forgiveness (Stuart, 2004)**

1. Describe the mistake you made.
2. "Name the Hurt". Specifically identify the damage you inflicted both on the patient and on yourself. Define the actual **loss** whether physical, emotional, social (relationship), professional (image), or financial.
3. "Claim the Injury". Feel the feelings. Accept and incorporate the pain consciously.
4. Accept the responsibility. In order to forgive ourselves, we must first blame ourselves.
5. Come to some understanding of *why* this came to pass. Put yourself back into the time of the incident. What was your mental/physical state? What resources were you aware of? How much information did you have?
6. Think about what you might do differently if you had the opportunity to relive the situation. Now describe what you have learned. Commit to applying this learning in the future.
7. Make a decision to forgive yourself while remembering the experience with reverence. Gratefully acknowledge the gift given by the person whom you hurt. Vow to honor that gift.
8. Totally let go of your pain and guilt.

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