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How to forgive a friend who has betrayed you

We asked the experts for some tips on how to process betrayal, how to move on and to find forgiveness

[Chloe Rose Stuart-Ulin](#) · CBC Life · Posted: Aug 22, 2018 5:25 PM ET | Last Updated: August 22, 2018



(Credit: iStock/Getty Images)

We experience disappointments and minor betrayals from friends on a regular basis, from a BFF bailing on dinner plans at the last minute to them sharing private details when we wish they hadn't. When we face something we perceive as a particularly egregious act by a friend, a number of painful emotions can arise that may crowd out a measured response, making it difficult to respond, process, and move on. Grief and a deep sense of loss [are common emotions when our trust has been broken](#), and we're forced to ask ourselves uncomfortable questions. How could my friend do this to me? Were we even friends in the first place?

The closer the relationship, the greater the devastation after a transgression. Betrayals can be deeply complex, and if forgiveness cannot be achieved, [its negative effects may last for generations](#) with a tenacity similar to strong friendship bonds. So we asked some experts for tips on how to process betrayal, how to move on and to find forgiveness.

Think it through, then talk it out

What you perceive as a betrayal may not have seemed that way to your friend, and they might be completely oblivious to your feelings. Understanding your friend's reasoning for what they did may help heal your hurt feelings and salvage the relationship. Everyone makes mistakes, and it's possible that your friend hurt you without meaning to, which is why talking it out is such an important first step.

Then talk it out.

"When issues are not addressed, the risk of recurrence and lingering bad feelings is high," says [Dr. Emily Blake](#), a psychologist at Blake Psychology. "Friendships that do not allow space for communication when needed tend to deteriorate over time or become more superficial in nature."

Paradoxically, "a mild betrayal with a sour aftermath can spoil a friendship," says Dr. Blake, "while a severe betrayal with a healthy aftermath can create an even stronger bond."

Take stock of the impact this has had on you

After having a clear and honest conversation with your friend, try to give them the benefit of the doubt as you work towards rebuilding trust. If you decide that the friendship is worth salvaging, then it's up to both of you to keep moving forward.

"The healing comes predominantly in dealing with what emotions the betrayal brings up in the present moment," says [Dr. Esther Kalaba](#), a psychotherapist in Montreal. "I often see people hold in a lot of anger and direct it inwards — especially women who perhaps don't feel as free to express their anger."

With that in mind, you shouldn't expect to get over every betrayal right away, and it's important to take stock of how it has affected you in other relationships and areas of your life.

Resentment can bubble up and take you by surprise, so check in with yourself to root out the deeper impacts this betrayal has had on you. If you catch yourself dwelling on this breach of trust, unable to move on, then give the friendship some space.

"Even if you decide to forgive a betrayal," says Dr. Blake, "it does not mean that you have to continue the friendship. If you find that the betrayal goes against your values, you may still decide that you do not want to continue the friendship with that person."

Moving on

Has your friend recognized the depth of your pain and shown remorse for it? Did they listen respectfully and integrate that information into your relationship moving forward?

"We can't change in order to accommodate each other all the time," says [Coach Minda Miloff](#), a certified professional coach, "that's not why we're on this earth. You can't do the right thing all the time, but it behooves the other person to soften the blow and show some kind of genuine sensitivity to how the other person felt. It requires a certain maturity to apologize and explain your perspective. A mature person tries to help you forgive them."

Be prepared for your friendship to change as a result of this conversation, even in the light of forgiveness. Maybe you won't confide in them the way you once did, or put as much faith in the promises you share. For both of your sakes, you may need to alter your expectations moving forward.

"No matter how delicately you bring up the topic of feeling betrayed," adds Dr. Blake, "if your friend is unwilling to process it with you, your friendship could be broken." Issues swept under the rug tend to pile up, and trust will deteriorate despite the seemingly positive conversations about the problem.

Finding forgiveness

Once you've had the necessary conversation about what occurred, it's time to start thinking about true forgiveness. Coach Minda explains, "We may still feel justified in our anger and hurt, but trying to understand what the person was thinking or feeling when they betrayed us is really valuable to know."

Forgiveness can be a powerful tool, not just in forming stronger bonds but as a method of healing.

Processing these feelings matters, since anger and grief that fester can negatively impact your mental health in the long term. A [2003 study of 108 college students](#) revealed that forgiveness lowers blood pressure and stress after an incident of betrayal and conflict. By contrast, those who held onto negative emotions associated with the initial betrayal showed the highest levels of cardiovascular reactivity and poorest recovery patterns.

"It comes down to grieving because there's a shift that happens in the relationship when a betrayal occurs," says Dr. Kalaba, "whether it's an ending or a new phase beginning."

Practical steps

Finally, some tips from Dr. Emily Blake to help deal with a friend's transgression and move through the communication that follows.

1. Name it to tame it. Try to identify how you feel. There could be a mix of feelings at play, and naming emotions helps to calm them.
2. Try to understand exactly what it is that you feel upset about. The more precise you can be about the impact that it had on you, the better you will understand your own emotions, and the clearer you can be if you discuss it with your friend later.
3. Ask the friend if they would be willing to discuss what happened. Use "I feel" statements and express yourself in a calm and compassionate way, but understand that some people are just not open to feedback. Can you be okay with that?
4. Choose your timing. Try to set a specific time that works for both of you. While it's never really a "good time" (who wants to discuss something difficult?), remember that a "we'll discuss it later" mentality can be a stalling tactic for avoiding it all together, which can make things worse. When people say that they "don't have time for this right now," they might actually be

spending hours and hours ruminating on it. All the energy put into not discussing it is usually way more energy than what might go into discussing it, even when it's painful.

5. If you decide to have the all-important conversation with a friend, make a space for unpleasant feelings such as fear, anxiety, vulnerability, and communicate from the heart.

Chloe Rose Stuart-Ulin is a freelance writer based in Montreal. Her most recent works on tech, gender, and finance have appeared in CBC, Quartz, and Lift.

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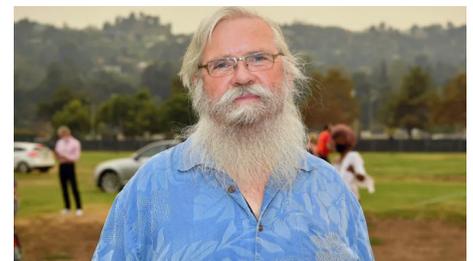
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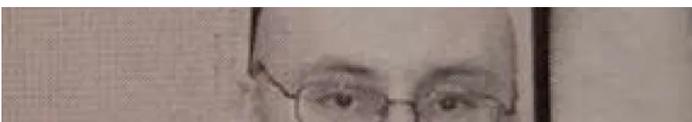
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