

Not Ready to Make Nice

*Forgive.... sounds good... forget..... I'm not sure I could.
They say time heals everything. I'm still waiting.
I'm through with doubt. There's nothing left for me to figure out.
I've paid a price and I'll keep paying it.
I'm not ready to make nice. I'm not ready to back down.
I'm still mad as hell and I don't have time to go round and round and
round.
It's too late to make it right. Probably wouldn't if I could.
'Cause I'm mad as hell and can't bring myself to do what it is you think I
should.*

Words & Music by Emily Robinson, Martie Maguire, Natalie Maines and Dan Wilson of the Dixie Chicks.

Betrayal ... it's the injury to a relationship that keeps on hurting. It's a violation of trust that is impossible to forget. It could be your parent who turned against you as a child and continues to be oblivious to how they hurt you. It could be a friend who broke an important confidence, or your spouse who had an extra-marital affair. When another person we care about hurts us by betrayal, the pain can be unbearable. It can last a very long time. It is made more difficult when one cannot get distance from the person who hurt you.

In her book, *How Can I Forgive You?*, best selling author of *After the Affair*, Janis Abrahms Spring, provides a clear and helpful framework for understanding the complex inter-personal process for trying to forgive. What is most helpful is the distinction she makes between *acceptance* and *forgiveness*.

Acceptance is a courageous life-affirming response to a violation based on a *personal* decision to take control of your pain, make sense of your injury and carve out a relationship with the offender that works for you.

Forgiveness is an *inter-personal* transaction which requires the heartfelt participation of both of you. Genuine forgiveness must be earned, and requires the offending person to be fully aware of their hurtful actions and never intend to repeat them. Meanwhile the hurt person makes a dramatic transfer of vigilance from protecting the injury to letting go of it.

Most of us feel the moral imperative to forgive, but the pressure to do so can make one feel worse. Often the offending person is oblivious to the consequences of their actions. Deciding to be content with acceptance

can be very liberating. Acceptance does not mean excusing the person. By choosing acceptance, you try to understand the person and the circumstances more thoroughly. Then with time, you come to a greater sense of peace. With acceptance, the nature of the closeness of relationship may change permanently. Acceptance is easier with someone you do not see every day like a friend or family member who has hurt you.

Forgiveness, on the other hand is a much more complicated interpersonal process which requires a great deal more from the person who hurt you. The forgiveness process applies to couples torn apart by the discovery of an extra-marital affair and who really want to try to mend their broken relationship. The unfaithful partner needs to accept responsibility for his/her behaviour, have empathy for your pain, and demonstrate new trustworthy actions. This takes plenty of time and energy. Many people cannot accomplish this and must be content with acceptance. Some couples can genuinely forgive. It takes courage, patience and perseverance and usually a counsellor to help to facilitate the forgiveness process after an affair.

In the lyrics quoted above the sentiment captures beautifully how difficult it is to “make nice” or get through and let go of the pain of betrayal in any relationship. Accepting allows you greater freedom, forgiving takes great courage.