

Learning to Let Go of Past Hurts: 5 Ways to Move On

By [John M. Grohol, Psy.D.](#)

~ 5 min read



We've all been hurt. You can't be an adult — or teen — alive today who hasn't experienced some kind of emotional pain.

It hurts. I get that.

But what you do with that hurt is probably more important than the hurt itself. Would you prefer to get back to being an active liver of life? Or do you prefer to ruminate endlessly about the past and something that cannot be changed?

In short, how do you let go of past hurts and move on? Let's find out...

Blaming others for our hurt is what most of us start off doing. Somebody did something wrong, or they wronged us in some way that mattered to us. We want them to apologize. We want them to acknowledge what they did was wrong.

But blaming someone else for our hurt can backfire, as [Holly Brown notes](#):

The problem with blaming others is that it can often leave you powerless. For example, you confront the person (your boss, your spouse, your parent, your child), and they say, "No, I didn't," or worse, "So what if I did?", then you're left with all this anger and hurt and no resolution.

All your feelings are legitimate. It's important to feel them fully, and then move on. Nursing your grievances indefinitely is a bad habit, because (as the title goes) it hurts you more than it hurts them.

People who hold on to these past hurts often relive the pain over and over in their minds. Sometimes a person can even get "stuck" in this pain, in this hurt, in this blame.

5 Ways to Let Go of Past Hurts

The only way you can accept new joy and happiness into your life is to make space for it. If your heart is filled full-up with pain and hurt, how can you be open to anything new?

1. Make the decision to let it go.

Things don't disappear on their own. You need to make the commitment to "let it go." If you don't make this conscious choice up-front, you could end up self-sabotaging any effort to move on from this past hurt.

Making the decision to let it go also means accepting you have a choice to let it go. To stop reliving the past pain, to stop going over the details of the story in your head every time you think of the other person (after you finish step 2 below).

2. Express your pain — and your responsibility.

Express the pain the hurt made you feel, whether it's directly to the other person, or through just getting it out of your system (like venting to a friend, or writing in a journal, or writing a letter you never send to the other person). Get it all out of your system at once. Doing so will also help you understand what — specifically — your hurt is about.

We don't live in a world of black and whites, even when sometimes it feels like we do. While you may not have had the same amount of responsibility for the hurt you experienced, there may have been a part of the hurt that you are also partially responsible for. What could you have done differently next time? Are you an active participant in your own life, or simply a hopeless victim? Will you let your pain become your identity? Or are you someone deeper and more complex than that??

3. Stop being the victim and blaming others.

Being the victim feels good — it's like being on the winning team of you against the world. But guess what? The world largely doesn't care, so you need to get over yourself. Yes, you're special. Yes, your feelings matter. But don't confuse with "your feelings matter" to "your feelings should override all else, and nothing else matters." Your feelings are just one part of this large thing we call life, which is all interwoven and complex. And messy.

In every moment, you have that choice — to continue to feel bad about another person's actions, or to start feeling good. You need to take responsibility for your own happiness, and not put such power into the hands of another person. Why would you let the person who hurt you — in the past — have such power, right here, right now?

No amount of [ruminating](#) or analyses have ever fixed a relationship problem. Never. Not in the entirety of the world's history. So why choose to engage in so much thought and devote so much energy to a person who you feel has wronged you?

4. Focus on the present — the here and now — and joy.

Now it's time to let go. Let go of the past, and stop reliving it. Stop telling yourself that story where the protagonist — you — is forever the victim of this other person's horrible actions. You can't undo the past, all you can do is to make today the best day of your life.

When you focus on the here and now, you have less time to think about the past. When the past memories creep into your consciousness (as they are bound to do from time to time), acknowledge them for a moment. And then bring yourself gently back into the present moment. Some people find it easier to do this with a conscious cue, such as saying to yourself, "It's alright. That was the past, and now I'm focused on my own happiness and doing _____."

Remember, if we crowd our brains — and lives — with hurt feelings, there's little room for anything positive. It's a choice you're making to continue to feel the hurt, rather than welcoming joy back into your life.

5. Forgive them — and yourself.

We may not have to forget another person's bad behaviors, but virtually everybody deserves our forgiveness. Sometimes we get stuck in our pain and our stubbornness, we can't even imagine forgiveness. But forgiveness isn't saying, "I agree with what you did." Instead, it's saying, "I don't agree with what you did, but I forgive you anyway."

Forgiveness isn't a sign of weakness. Instead, it's simply saying, "I'm a good person. You're a good person. You did something that hurt me. But I want to move forward in my life and welcome joy back into it. I can't do that fully until I let this go."

Forgiveness is a way of tangibly letting something go. It's also a way of empathizing with the other person, and trying to see things from their point of view.

And forgiving yourself may be an important part of this step as well, as sometimes we may end up blaming ourselves for the situation or hurt. While we indeed may have had some part to play in the hurt (see step 2), there's no reason you need to keep beating yourself up over it. If you can't forgive yourself, how will you be able to live in future peace and happiness?

* * *

I know this stuff is hard, that it's incredibly hard to let go of one's pain. If we've held onto it for a long time, it feels like an old friend. Justified. It would be sacrilegious to let it go.

But nobody's life should be defined by their pain. It's not healthy, it adds to our stress, it hurts our ability to focus, study and work, and it impacts every other relationship we have (even the ones not directly affected by the hurt). Every day you choose to hold on to the pain is another day everybody around you has to live with that decision. And feel its consequences.

So do everybody — and yourself — a big favor: Let go of the pain. Do something different today and welcome happiness back into your life.