Unconditional Forgiveness Method Intervention; An Adlerian Perspective

A Research Paper

Presented to

The Faculty of the Adler Graduate School

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree of Master of Arts in

Adlerian Counseling and Psychotherapy

By: Linda Lee LaBarre

December, 2012
Abstract

This research paper explores the use of the Unconditional Forgiveness method as a psychotherapeutic intervention in an Adlerian context. It is an in depth review of forgiveness as it relates to Adlerian psychology. This research paper will include a synthesis of the literature and a review of forgiveness therapy. This work will also explore forgiveness therapy and an understanding of forgiveness in a secular context. This research makes a compelling argument that the Unconditional Forgiveness method supports Adlerian Therapeutic goals. No formal research has been conducted on the Unconditional Forgiveness method. Future implications from this research include a study of the efficacy of the method and case studies of its application in a therapeutic setting.
Unconditional Forgiveness Method Intervention an Adlerian Perspective

Forgiveness is a common issue in therapy. Clients may be experiencing disappointment, grief and anger that are often linked to a forgiveness issue. Anytime a client is holding an expectation that cannot or will not be met there is a forgiveness issue (Grieco, 2011). Forgiveness is a natural part of being in community with others (Stauffer, 1987). Forgiveness therapy can provide an aid to clients when they are experiencing a forgiveness issue that remains stuck or unresolved (Luskin, 2002). Many spiritual traditions and faith practices share the same goal of improving an individual’s sense of wellbeing as well as promoting unity within the community. This paper will explore the concept of forgiveness as a psychotherapeutic intervention to increase mental health and social connections. It will also connect the goals of spiritual forgiveness traditions and Individual Psychology.

Current Research Definitions of Forgiveness

Forgiveness therapy has been a topic of discussion for researchers for many years. In past years a debate began about whether or not it is an appropriate therapeutic intervention. There was a fear of forgiveness interventions as “being harmful to the victim and minimizing their feelings regarding the offence” (Reed, Burkett, & Garzon, 2001, p. 3). The work of defining forgiveness has been enthusiastically explored in recent years for the purposes of research clarity and to enhance therapeutic understanding. An article written in 2007 stated that “by 2005 the definitional controversies had quietly subsided, with a broad consensus on what forgiveness is not, and much agreement on what it is” (Worthington, Witvliet, Pietrini, & Miller, 2007, p. 292).

Forgiveness as defined by Enright and Luskin

Enright’s research definition is now seen as the most common and agreed upon theoretical definition of forgiveness. It says “Forgiveness is a willingness to abandon one’s right
to resentment, negative judgment, and indifferent behavior toward one who unjustly injured us, while fostering the undeserved qualities of compassion, generosity and even love toward him or her” (Enright, & Fitzgibbons, 2002, p. 24). Enright and Luskin use a similar set of qualifiers to detail what forgiveness is and what it is not. What it is not is just as important to understanding the process as what it is because it creates a fuller and more appealing concept once it is fully contemplated. Forgiveness is not excusing the accused. It does marginalize the injury or dismiss the injustice. It is not reconciliation focused and it does not threaten the autonomy of feelings of the individual doing the forgiving.

Below is a bulleted list of characteristics of what forgiveness is and is not. This list has been paraphrased from Luskin’s book, Forgive for Good: A Proven Prescription for Health and Happiness, it is a list he would present to his clients, or in forgiveness education groups as an outline for understanding forgiveness in the therapeutic context. According to Luskin, (2002) the following characteristics explain forgiveness:

Forgiveness is

- Is the peace you learn when you allow these circling planes to land.
- Forgiveness is for you and not the offender.
- It is taking back your power.
- Forgiveness is taking responsibility for how you feel. It is about healing and not about the people who hurt you.
- Forgiveness is a trainable skill that helps you get control over your feelings.
- Forgiveness can improve your mental and physical health.
- It is becoming a hero and not a victim.
- Forgiveness is a choice, and everyone can learn how to forgive
Forgiveness is not

- Forgiveness is not condoning unkindness.
- It is not forgetting that something painful happened to you.
- Forgiveness is not excusing poor behavior, and it does not have to be an otherworldly or religious experience.
- Forgiveness is not denying or minimizing hurts.
- It does not mean reconciliation with the offender.
- Forgiveness does not mean you have to give up having feelings.

(p. iv)"

Laying the ground work for having a shared understanding of forgiveness is an important part when beginning the Unconditional Forgiveness method. Below is the definition of forgiveness used in preparing for the Unconditional Forgiveness intervention.

**Unconditional Forgiveness Method’s definition**

Unconditional forgiveness is the releasing of an expectation and a reestablishment of personal boundaries. The act of forgiveness gives full responsibility to the person who is being forgiven, and owning any responsibility the forgiver may have in the matter. Forgiveness involves accepting the person being forgiven as who he/she is, even though the forgiver may prefer that the person being forgiven was different or would behave differently. Forgiveness is not reconciliation. One does not need to reconcile with the other person in order to forgive him or her. Rather the statement is, “Forgive and remember.” The act of forgiving another person is done for the benefit of the person doing the forgiving. Reconciliation may happen as a result but that is not the goal or the focus of the forgiveness intervention. The Unconditional Forgiveness Intervention is an effective intervention for facilitating forgiveness (Grieco, 2011). The
Unconditional Forgiveness method works well with many clients. It can be utilized and adapted to be effective with clients with diverse backgrounds and belief systems (Grieco, 2011). It also supports Adlerian theory and shares a goal of increased social connections.

**Physical and Mental Health Benefits of Forgiveness**

The concept of forgiveness is being looked at in many fields and in different ways. For example, heart care specialist Dean Ornish, treated patients with serious heart issues and had great success in prescribing group counseling, increasing emotional connections and forgiveness. The patients that participated in these interventions had better outcomes and decreased symptoms from heart disease (Ornish, 1998).

In a study conducted by the Friedman’s Recurrent Coronary Prevention Project in 1986, researchers studied patients at risk for coronary disease. They were introduced to forgiveness in a group therapy setting. “After a ten week forgiveness intervention with male patients who had coronary artery disease, no difference was found between the control groups from the pre- to post-test. However, after a 10-week follow up a difference emerged. Participants in the forgiveness group experienced reduced anger-induced myocardial perfusion defects.” (Worthington, Witvliet, Pietrini, & Miller, 2007, p. 299) “The ability to cultivate a forgiving heart” was one of the keys to reducing the hostility that contributes to anger-induced myocardial perfusion defects (Worthington, et al., 2007, p. 289-290).

Forgiveness helps to decrease negative physical health symptoms. A state of unforgiveness increases feelings of anger and depression (Worthington, et al., 2007). Over time these negative feelings regarding a forgiveness issue can increase stress and other negative health responses that lead to greater health problems. “Forgiveness may serve both as an antidote to the health-eroding processes of stress, hostility, and rumination, and as an agonist for the health-
promoting process of positive other-oriented emotion.” (Worthington, et al., 2007, p. 296) An individual can make real and significant decrease in negative feelings by learning about forgiveness as a concept. The health benefits can still be beneficial even if they have not committed to total forgiveness. Learning about forgiveness as a concept and not completely forgiving can contribute to a decrease in negative symptoms. Unfortunately, these decreases tend to be short lasting (Harris, 2006). The distress tends to reappear over time. Following through with the forgiveness intervention provides a complete and lasting release of the transgression.

Preliminary studies have shown that forgiveness training helps participants increase self-confidence and interpersonal gains (Worthington, et al., 2007). Cancer patients have been found to benefit from forgiveness; Participants took a 4 week class to learn about forgiveness, “from pre- to post-test, the forgiveness group had higher gains in forgiveness, hope and quality of life, and higher reductions in anger than did the control group” (Worthington, et al., 2007, p. 299).

Increases in physical health by reducing chronic stress in the body are evident in both forgiveness of another interventions and self-forgiveness interventions. Unforgiveness is habitually stressful; chronic stress builds up over time. Forgiveness interventions may contribute to positive physical health outcomes.

Forgiveness Benefits of Increasing Social Connection

Policy makers, medical professionals, atheists and the faithful are all discovering the beauty and benefits of forgiveness education and practice. What was once the primacy of our religious traditions is now being given a larger stage for human consideration. Respected professionals from a variety of fields are currently concluding their research of what we have intuitively known for centuries. Forgiveness is good. Forgiveness sets individuals free from emotional turmoil and makes them whole again.
Having the ability to forgive plays a key role in the continuation of community. In his book *Beyond Revenge: The Evolution of the Forgiveness Instinct*, McCullough, 2008, details several evolutionary hypotheses as to why forgiveness has been beneficial to the human and non-human world. In 1979 De Waal and coworkers were studying primate behavior when they observed primates participating in behaviors to facilitate forgiveness with the goal of reconciliation. The Chimpanzee’s behavior resembled human behaviors related to forgiveness and reconciliation. A male chimpanzee was observed acting aggressively toward a female. In response, members of the larger chimpanzee group started hooting and making noise. The male chimpanzee then went over to the female and the two kissed and embraced. Kissing is not entirely uncommon for monkeys but when researchers took a closer look. They observed that out of “350 non aggressive encounters only 50, or 14 percent of those encounters preceded some sort of friendly contact. However, 179, or 51 percent of aggressive encounters were followed by friendly contact” (McCullough, 2008, p. 118). This was a staggering discovery - “friendly contact was even more common after conflict than it was during conflict free periods.” (McCullough, 2008, p.118) Forgiveness is utilized in nonhuman species as a way to promote peaceful and cooperative social relations. Researchers have learned much about social interactions of human by viewing the social constructs of other non-human animals. McCullough writes, “When you use the conceptual tools of evolutionary science as a lens through which to view the past century of research on forgiveness, you can’t help but conclude that our capacity for forgiveness is every bit as authentic as is our capacity for revenge”(2008, p. xviii). There is evidence of the evolutionary benefits to humans having the capacity for revenge and there are benefits to having a capacity for forgiveness. Revenge may be a quick and
necessary response to motivate an individual to survive a dangerous situation. Forgiveness is a natural process by which humans repair social connections.

**Therapeutic Application of Forgiveness Methods**

In clinical practice it is necessary to first educate the clients about forgiveness as a concept in order to illustrate the benefits of forgiveness. Establishing a safe space to discuss forgiveness and by minimizing the clients’ fears and insecurities as they explore their forgiveness issue allows them to open to themselves to the concept of forgiveness (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). Each client will have his/her own unique religious, ethical or cultural understandings of forgiveness. Clients often need to learn more about the concept and talk through many misconceptions and barriers to the forgiveness concept. Once individuals learn about forgiveness and it is presented to them as an option for dealing with the psychological effects of not forgiving, they will tend to be open and trusting of the process (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). It is critically important to address any concerns a client may have about references to specific religious teachings about forgiveness and reconciliation. This idea needs to be in place for many people in order for them to feel safe enough to open up to forgiveness as a viable concept. For some forgiveness issues, it is simply too dangerous for the client to even consider reconciliation. But that does not mean that an individual cannot benefit from forgiveness and reconcile the injustice for him-or herself.

There are several therapeutic methods that can be utilized to facilitate forgiveness with therapy clients. They share some similarities in technique and intervention. They may also have as some important differences that could make one better suited to some clients.
Enright Forgiveness Inventory

Enright and Mind Garden Inc. developed an assessment inventory to help practitioners test whether or not forgiveness has been achieved. The 150-item scale measures the degree of interpersonal forgiveness. The methods used to develop the assessment instrument combined with the similarities in therapeutic concepts and techniques used among current forgiveness therapy give new insight into the how and why forgiveness therapy works (Enright & Rique, 2002).

The Inventory measures things like the degree of; how deeply hurt was the participant by the incident. It measures the agent of the hurt. Who was the transgressor and how close of a relationship did he/she have with that person? Is the forgivee still alive and how long has it been since the offense. It gathers a brief description of the offending situation and includes a series of questions about the current attitude toward the person who hurt them. The forgiveness inventory is appropriate for young adults and adults. It is coded to work with English speaker at a fifth grade reading level. But more languages will become available for future use to clinicians. The Instrument was originally tested with 197 college students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and 197 of the students same sex parents. The students’ parents we ask to participate in order to “standardize the context of education, social class, and values shared by late adolescents and adults and to facilitate accurate developmental comparisons” (as quoted in Enright & Rique, 2002, p. 14) This example study and several additional preliminary studies confirmed the instrument was able to reliably measure forgiveness and the scale can now be utilized with clients. The Enright Forgiveness Inventory is a self-administered survey. Many questions include a six point Likert scale with a few questions addressing the specific forgiveness narrative. The
Inventory works well in a group setting or an individual setting. And can be administered pre-forgiveness intervention and post- forgiveness intervention.

Current research on Emotion-Focused Forgiveness Therapy and forgiveness interventions in psychotherapy shows forgiveness is effective in decreasing negative thought patterns in clients (Greenburg, Warwar, & Malcolm, 2008). The prevailing research mainly focuses on group psychoeducation. A study published in 2008 used the Enright Forgiveness scale to measure the effectiveness of using Emotion Focused therapy and the Gestalt empty chair method in facilitating forgiveness in individuals. The researchers used the forgiveness scale surveys three times during the research period. First they measured the participants Forgiveness scale prior to individual therapy. Then the scale was again used after therapy has ended and finally three months later, giving the researchers a clear picture of what had changed, and if the change was long lasting. “The results indicate that clients in EFT using the empty chair dialogue showed significantly more improvement than the psychoeducation on all measures of forgiveness and letting go, as well as global symptoms and key target complaints” (Greenberg et al., 2008, p. 185). EFT participants “exhibited the highest levels of forgiveness gains and the greatest levels of symptom reduction.” (Greenberg, et al., 2008, p. 191) Symptoms of unforgiveness include higher stress levels, a quickness to become angry or become irritated. They may also include depression and inability to concentrate.

Enright and the Human Development Group

The Human Development Group’s Model presents a four-phase and 20 unit education curriculum. The curriculum is covers over several weeks. It is based on uncovering cognitive and emotional variables to help the clients become aware of the defense mechanism formed to protect themselves from the emotional pain and trauma of the forgiveness issue. The 20 units
cover a variety of issues ranging from denial and shame to justice and empathy. (See appendix A for the complete list of units) The Development Group’s method is a detailed, systematic and academic dissection of the forgiveness process. It primarily involves the cognitive processes of the client. It takes the perspective of the person doing the forgiving and utilizes the 20 units of psychoeducation as a platform to move toward forgiveness. Once the process model is completed by the client they are given the Enright Forgiveness Inventory.

**Emotion-Focused Forgiveness Therapy**

Current research on Emotion-Focused Forgiveness Therapy and forgiveness interventions in psychotherapy shows forgiveness is effective in decreasing negative thought patterns in clients (Greenburg, Warwar, & Malcolm, 2008). The prevailing research mainly focuses on group psychoeducation. A study published in 2008 used the Enright Forgiveness scale to measure the effectiveness of using Emotion Focused therapy and the Gestalt empty chair method in facilitating forgiveness in individuals. The researchers used the forgiveness scale surveys three times during the research period. First they measured the participants Forgiveness scale prior to individual therapy. Then the scale was again used after therapy has ended and finally three months later, giving the researchers a clear picture of what had changed, and if the change was long lasting. “The results indicate that clients in EFT using the empty chair dialogue showed significantly more improvement than the psychoeducation on all measures of forgiveness and letting go, as well as global symptoms and key target complaints” (Greenberg et al, 2008, p. 185). EFT participants “exhibited the highest levels of forgiveness gains and the greatest levels of symptom reduction” (Greenberg, et al, 2008, p. 191). Symptoms of unforgiveness include higher stress levels, a quickness to become angry or become irritated. They may also include depression and inability to concentrate.
Dr. Luskin’s Research and Method of Forgiveness

The REACH method. Research conducted by Luskin in 2006, looked at transpersonal psychology theories to understand what makes up a transformative process like the ones experienced in spiritual practices, yoga/meditation, and forgiveness. He stated that a transpersonal theorist realizes that “the depth and the span of the Great Chain of Being is the purpose of life. By purpose, they mean the ultimate in evolution where human development reaches its peak” (p. s-16). The concept of The Great Chain is represented as matter, body, mind, soul, spirit. These qualities are linked to each other and are developed on different levels depending on the focus of each individual. Luskin also explores the concepts of Meme stages of development. He detailed how these stages of development can be enhanced by learning new psychosocial skills, such as Learned Optimism and other Positive Psychology techniques; techniques that include Forgiveness Therapy. Psychosocial skill development is similar to the psychoeducation process of the Unconditional Forgiveness method.

Luskin’s research with “the largest interpersonal forgiveness study to date” The Stanford Forgiveness Project and The Human Development Groups findings confirm, that individuals trained in forgiveness processes and positive thinking can learn how to help themselves experience greater satisfaction in life and reduce depressive emotional, and physical symptoms. Similarly he writes, “The quality of positive psychology or specific virtue that has the greatest empirical support is the quality of forgiveness. A number of controlled intervention studies attest to the effectiveness of forgiveness training to improve emotional, physical, and relationship well-being” (Luskin, 2004 p s-20).

The goal of Luskin and Harris’s research on the Effects of a Group Forgiveness Intervention on Forgiveness, Perceived Stress, and Trait-Anger, was to measure the effects of a
6-week forgiveness intervention on three outcomes: (a) offense-specific forgiveness. (b) forgiveness-likelihood in new situations, and (c) health related psychosocial variables, such as trait anger. The study concluded that the intervention reduced negative feelings against the transgressor by 2 to 3 times more effectively than the control conditions, and it increased participant’s positive thoughts and decreased perceived levels of stress. A discussion of the definition of forgiveness was aligned with many researchers including Worthington’s (Harris, 2006, p. 715). The participants were split into two groups. One group was to attend a six week course on forgiveness and the other group had no intervention during the six weeks. However, researchers found it difficult to attract male participants to the study. They had greater success in recruiting males when they changed the language form “forgiveness training” to “grudge management” The first group learned the REACH method of forgiving and were given several hours of class time over a six week period to explore their forgiveness issue. The REACH method was developed by Worthington in 1996 after becoming confronted with a personal crime against a family member. Luskin also came to forgiveness research through a desire to heal a personal wound. The two researchers combined their theoretical knowledge, their personal experiences and their research efforts to qualitatively and quantitatively better understand forgiveness. Worthington’s five step technique of forgiveness is REACH. REACH, stands for the following:

- Recalling the event
- Empathize with the one who hurt you
- Altruistic perspective is given
- Commitment to forgive, make a public statement to forgive
- Hold on to the gains you have made as a result of forgiving.
Paraphrased from (Harris, 2006, p. 717).

The control group participants and the group given forgiveness training were then surveyed to see if there was any change in their experience of the original forgiveness issue. The control group was given no psycho-education at all. The results strongly indicated that the group with the six weeks of forgiveness training benefited from the lessons and were more likely to use forgiveness techniques in the future. The group given forgiveness training was “2 to 3 times more effective than the control conditions and it produces a significantly greater increase in positive thoughts and feeling toward the transgressor” (Harris, 2006, p. 715).

Luskin and his fellow researchers at the Stanford Forgiveness project have studied a number of controlled interventions including the Human Development process model of forgiveness. In an article for the Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine, Luskin writes about his findings about forgiveness therapy, “Forgiveness training reduced hurt, state and trait anger and increased compassion, self-efficacy, forgiveness likelihood and hope” (Luskin, 2004, p. s-20). Since Luskin’s work in 2004 and as a result of years of compiling the evidence of positive findings to reinforce forgiveness therapies effectiveness Luskin has developed a self-help 9 step forgiveness intervention.

**Luskin’s 9 Step Method.** From the supplemental website created to enhance the book *How to Forgive for Good:*

1. “Know exactly how you feel about what happened and be able to articulate what about the situation is not OK. Then, tell a trusted couple of people about your experience.

2. Make a commitment to yourself to do what you have to do to feel better. Forgiveness is for you and not for anyone else.
3. Forgiveness does not necessarily mean reconciliation with the person that hurt you, or condoning of their action. What you are after is to find peace. Forgiveness can be defined as the “peace and understanding that come from blaming that which has hurt you less, taking the life experience less personally, and changing your grievance story.”

4. Get the right perspective on what is happening. Recognize that your primary distress is coming from the hurt feelings, thoughts and physical upset you are suffering now, not what offended you or hurt you two minutes – or ten years – ago. Forgiveness helps to heal those hurt feelings.

5. At the moment you feel upset practice a simple stress management technique to soothe your body’s flight or fight response.

6. Give up expecting things from other people, or your life, that they do not choose to give you. Recognize the “unenforceable rules” you have for your health or how you or other people must behave. Remind yourself that you can hope for health, love, peace and prosperity and work hard to get them.

7. Put your energy into looking for another way to get your positive goals met than through the experience that has hurt you. Instead of mentally replaying your hurt seek out new ways to get what you want.
8. Remember that a life well lived is your best revenge. Instead of focusing on your wounded feelings, and thereby giving the person who caused you pain power over you, learn to look for the love, beauty and kindness around you. Forgiveness is about personal power.

9. Amend your grievance story to remind you of the heroic choice to forgive.”

(Luskin, http://learningtoforgive.com/9-steps/).

In summary, individual clients’ definitions of forgiveness are varied, complex and difficult for some to articulate. Learning how to forgive is not. Teaching forgiveness is a skill and it can be developed. Teaching clients a step by step method of forgiveness is empowering and the client comes away with a life skill they can utilize in the future. It is a complicated task to statistically measure whether or not a person has or has not forgiven, although Enright’s forgiveness survey does provide a standardized measurement of forgiveness and unforgiveness, but it is often not necessary and it very clear to the client and the clinician that something has changed and the power of the forgiveness issue has shifted. As clinicians utilizing “practice based evidence” to increase understanding of how and why therapeutic interventions like the Unconditional Forgiveness method are therapeutically effective in practice. Because of the history and depth of Forgiveness study and its continual use as a therapeutic intervention the Unconditional Forgiveness method is a clinician-approved method and a legitimate theoretical stance.
The Unconditional Forgiveness Method as a Therapeutic Application

The Unconditional Forgiveness Method is a step-by-step psychotherapeutic intervention that can be utilized by therapists with their clients to resolve a forgiveness issue. The technique utilizes a type of psycho-drama and is similar to the empty chair method. It integrates the whole person by tapping into the emotions, physical sensations, movements, inner resources and spiritual connection of the client. The mind, body, and spiritual components of the method make it a powerful and effective intervention for real psychological healing and relief (Grieco, 2011). This method is very successful used in group and individual setting. The focus of this research is on its application in individual therapy.

History of the Method

The method was developed by Dr. Edith Stauffer in California. Dr. Stauffer was a student of Dr. Roberto Assagioli. She saw much suffering in her clients was caused by unresolved forgiveness issues and she worked to resolve that suffering. Through the many years of work as a psychologist she began to see the natural unfolding of the psychological process of forgiveness. She understood it as an organic and natural spiritual progression for coming to terms with forgiveness. Her experience as a clinician and her training with Dr. Assagioli led her to develop a therapeutic technique to speed up the process of forgiveness. This way she was able to utilize the step by step Unconditional Forgiveness method to achieve a more speedy recovery to good mental health. She also helped those clients who remained stuck in forgiveness issue despite the natural progression of forgiving over time (Stauffer, 1987, p. 224).

Dr. Stauffer wrote extensively about the method. She taught it all over the world and became a champion of forgiveness. She passed along her teachings to many other therapists and clinicians including forgiveness trainer Mary Hayes Grieco. Mary is a practitioner of the method,
a teacher, writer and public speaker. Her message of healing and unconditional love and forgiveness has been heard all over the world, and is well received by people with various cultural traditions and religious backgrounds.

Research now supports what Dr. Stauffer came to realize during her work with clients. Humans seem to be hard-wired for forgiveness knowing how and when to do it is the hard part. “Reconciling and forgiving are not passive enterprises” (McCullough, 2008, p. 131). Humans are wired for forgiveness and have a neurological process that includes “conditional adaptations” (McCullough, 2008 p. 132). These adaptations are contingent on first securing personal safety and then a shared construct of the benefits of forgiveness. “If natural selection created human beings with a ‘forgiving instinct,’ it did so by building a set of computational tools that crunch the numbers to figure out whom, what, where, and when we should forgive”( McCullough, 2008, p. 133). Forgiveness therapy helps clients to build a conceptual understanding of forgiveness and a safe place to explore vengeance and forgiveness. It is also where the skills and tools learned in becoming more forgiving have the lasting effect of promoting social connection and empathy for others.

**Conceptualizing a Connection to Unconditional Love**

Empathy and Unconditional love are two sides of the same coin. It is necessary for the individual to draw upon a connection to a source of unconditional love: to feel and remember it as being central to his/her experience before engaging in the forgiveness therapy. In the Unconditional Forgiveness method a conceptualization of a source of unconditional love is used to promote a holistic connection to the larger community (Grieco, 2011). Unconditional love is used to solidify a connection that is compassionate. This construct becomes a supportive inner resource while the client is going through the steps. It is also a metaphoric mediator in bridging
empathy toward the person being forgiven. Regardless of the client’s spiritual tradition, understanding, non-tradition or atheist beliefs, the Unconditional Forgiveness method can still provide useful. It is necessary is that the client be able to visualize one person who was unconditionally loving to them, to recall the feelings of being around that person and to know the loving qualities of that individual. This is the limitless source of unconditional love that is necessary to increase forgiveness, and to build feelings of Social Interest, Compassion, Self-esteem, and spiritual awareness.

When clients do not have a strong connection to a spiritual source they often find this source in a grandparent, teacher, family member or friend. As presented by Betty Lou Bettner at ICASSI in July of 2012, it is often painful for a client when remembering the source of loving kindness. If it is not from the people they are expecting it to be. Often client’s will think that they should have gotten messages of unconditional love from a mother or father but it is more common for people to connect that source of unconditional love to a grandparent, aunt or uncle, friend, neighbor or coach. Paraphrasing Bettner (July, 2012), She would frame the unconditional love concept with in the "Crucial Cs" - which is the need to `connect' ("I belong"), to see oneself as capable ("I can do it"), to `count' ("I can make a difference") and to have `courage' ("I can handle what comes"). Asking the client to recall that person who helped them to feel loved; who treated them as if they could make a difference and were encouraged by the relationship. Someone “who was interested in you”, “Smiles warmly at you”, “wanted to know about your day.” A client may need to be reassured that it is usual for individuals to find this source of unconditional love outside of primary family relationships (Bettner, July 2012). Having the client experience the remembering of his/her source of love and connection is a valuable component to preparing for forgiveness work. The client can call upon the memories of those
feelings when they are connecting to a universal source of unconditional love. Establishing this ability will provide the necessary internal connection needed to melt resentments and allow for the client to become emotionally vulnerable to the therapeutic process (Grieco, 2011). This will enable them to release their expectations and open up to getting their needs met in another way.

**Client Education and Expectations**

The Unconditional Forgiveness Method is teaching tool to creating a real life-coping skill. It is a concept like any other psychological intervention that utilizes the skills and motivations of the client to allow him/her to become more aware of the ways in which he/she can influence his/her own emotional state. There are limits to the power individuals have in impacting the world around them. Clients need coping skills. They need to have knowledge and training about how to deal with emotions that may or may not serve the individual. Clients may find themselves in a psychological bind when they are holding another person accountable for actions he/she finds nefarious. Many individuals suffer with “someone should make them pay for the wrong they committed” type of thoughts. This way of thinking puts clients on a moral high ground. And allows him/her to temporarily gain the relief of the “less than” feelings created during the forgiveness incident. Clients’ self-protecting ways make it impossible to see the bind he/she is in. Forgiveness issues often come with a component of personal shame for the client. Shame makes the safeguarding and self-protecting a high stakes endeavor. Unconditional Forgiveness removes shame from the client and places the guilt back on the offending individual.

**Interpersonal and Community Benefits**

As Unconditional Forgiveness trainer Mary Hayes Grieco says, “We are harmed in community and we are healed in it” (personal communication, M. H. Grieco, June 3, 2010). It is helpful to clients to have their story told, or to be heard and supported while telling the
forgiveness story. This story telling can be a very important step for the client to become more aware of the costs to his/herself of continuing to hold onto the forgiveness issue. Having a member of the community see, hear and understand what has happened can validate the individual’s worth and right to be upset. This experience of having a witness to the narrative goes a long way in helping the client prepare to let go of the self-imposed responsibility to continue to accuse the transgressor.

When clients learn tools like the Unconditional Forgiveness method they have the power to reestablish our democracy. Democracy in this understanding is “the absence of hereditary or arbitrary class distinctions or privileges” (http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/democracy) it addresses the humanistic Adlerian understanding that all individuals share a birthright of worth, love and safety. The Unconditional Forgiveness method focuses on the individual as a “socially embedded” creature. It takes a person from feeling inferior to becoming self-encouraging and responsible for their emotional well-being and connection to others. The Unconditional Forgiveness method also addresses shame and feelings of worthiness that block clients from being more connected to community feelings of empathy and love. A client’s forgiveness narrative will reveal the “goal” of the client and the Unconditional Forgiveness method will redirect a maladaptive set of emotions and behavior to meet that goal to a social constructive and positively adaptive way of meeting the clients’ strivings.

**Integrating the Unconditional Forgiveness Method with Adlerian Theory**

**Adlerian Theory and Spirituality Taxonomy**

Sperry and Mansager write with a deep understanding of Individual Psychology’s link to a spiritual connection. They created five categories of relationships that exist in spiritually-
oriented psychology (Sperry & Mansager, 2007). They urge theorists and researchers to become familiar with the taxonomy of spiritually-oriented psychology so that they can have a more clear understanding of their own psychological/spiritual relationship orientation. Clients will benefit from a more fully-formed understanding of their practitioners’ stance and practitioners will be more aware of their own orientation in relationship to the taxonomy.

Relationship 1 places religious and spiritual issues directly in the realm of psychological issues. The individuals spiritual concerns are considered to have primacy, therefore any spiritual concerns addressed will also be psychological in nature. Sperry and Mansager write, “The individual’s God representation basically reflects his or her parental representation(s).” Among more recent versions of Relationship 1, the forgiveness approach described by Worthington and Wade (1999) involves interventions in which the psychological domain has primacy. In this approach, religion and spirituality are considered simply moderators of forgiveness” (as cited in Sperry & Mansager, 2007, p. 362.)

Relationship 2 gives psychology and the spiritual domain the same primacy as each other. Any growth made in therapy would also essentially become spiritual growth. This is the operation of the Unconditional Forgiveness method as well. “Jung viewed the unconscious as a transpersonal and spiritual unconscious and considered all problems experienced by those past midlife as spiritual problems, representing the death of the inauthentic self which needs to be ‘reborn to a higher, spiritual form of selfhood’ (Cortright, 1997, p. 83). Assisting this rebirth is the task of Jungian therapy” (Sperry & Mansager, 2007, p. 362) The need for the inauthentic self to be reborn to a higher self is a very key component to transpersonal psychology in general and to the Unconditional Forgiveness method because it positions the client in a direct relationship to a spiritual source of love, understanding and forgiveness. This is especially powerful when
working with self-forgiveness techniques. Teaching individuals to access their higher spiritual consciousness gives them a sort of mastery over the experiences of everyday life.

In Relationship 3, psychological growth has primacy. The spiritual and psychological develop differently over time and at times are overlapping, impacting one another. Psychological growth remains the focus in psychotherapy.

In Relationship 4, psychological and spiritual aspects will develop separately and at time overlap but the spiritual aspects would have primacy. In this case, spiritual growth would not necessarily equal psychological growth or vice versa. Psychological and spiritual domains are different but the spiritual realm is foundational.

Relationship 5, the psychological and spiritual domains are different and yet neither has primacy over the other. One can move between psychological and spiritual concerns seamlessly. There is no distinction between the “Inner Self” and what is known to be the soul or the spirit. They are linked together and journey together for full personal growth.

Adlerian theories support the integration of spiritual experiences with psychological understandings of the human experience. “Adler’s holistic thought has been applied and described as a ‘critical collaboration’ between psychotherapeutic and spiritual approaches to the person (Mansager, 2000, 2005; Mansager & Savage, 2003). This holistic viewpoint posits that conscious awareness is the very point of connection between spirituality and psychotherapy. “Both spirituality and psychotherapy provide methods for exploring, deepening, and expanding consciousness” (Sperry & Mansager, 2004, p. 158).

The clinician that is aware of his/her personal relationship orientation will be better able to support his/her client’s therapeutic process. “This inclusive approach can support both natural and supernatural considerations of human difficulties as well as nontheistic understandings of
spirituality, such as those inherent in Buddhism and other secular understandings of ultimacy and the person.” (Mansager et al., 2002, p. 365; Noda, 2000). It promotes therapeutic interventions that are tailored to the client’s belief system regardless of the therapist’s orientation (Sperry & Mansager, 2007).

**Forgiveness combines Interconnectedness and Holistic Concepts of Social Interest**

Adlerian Individual Psychology and Assagiolis’ psychosynthesis practitioners agree that individuals are whole beings in community with each other and have a spiritual understanding of interrelatedness. There is debate in the psychological community about the role of psychology and its readings of spiritual matters. The ability of the client to connect to a source greater than his/herself is extremely useful in forgiveness therapy. This is where the ideas of Adler and Encouragement play a crucial role in fostering connection. “Dinkmeyer and Losoncy (1996) define encouragement as ‘the process of facilitating the development of a person’s inner resources and courage toward positive movement’” (as cited in Cheston, 2000, p. 298). Many clients already come to therapy with the tools to linking their inner resources to their outer world and to positive movement. The client’s ability to tap into that link most often comes in the form of a spiritual experience or connection. Clients have often had previous teaching or experience in connecting with their interior world through the lens of the spiritual realm.

Adler himself “only alluded to the spirituality in his writing and interviews. Because Adler’s view of spiritual development primarily involved support of religious activity and commitment that promoted or expanded one’s social interest … later proponents of Adlerian tradition, such as Mosak and Dreikurs, embraced the spiritual dimension or the search for meaning” (Cheston, 2000, p. 296). “The idea that spirituality is a relationship is a model of Adler’s premise that humans are naturally social beings who need to be understood within that
context (Sweeny, 1989). The definition that spirituality involves a search for meaning or purpose in life is exemplified by Adler’s belief that human psychic life is moving toward goals, some of which are fictional. The belief in a transcendent being or energy that causes a person to relate to the cosmos, God or universal values was the fifth life task that Adler alluded to in his writings and that has been more clearly defined by Mosak and Dreikurs (1967/2000)’” (as cited in Cheston, 2000, p. 301).

Unconditional forgiveness combines an Adlerian understanding of Social Interest by expanding one’s feelings of empathy and social connection. Adler believed that god and religion are human expressions of superiority. The idea of god is a manifestation of an individual’s desires to perfect the world we live in (or provide an excuse for why and individual did not succeed to their fullest ideals). This researcher has seen the incredible resilience of individuals who can form a connection to something greater than themselves as a psychological resource. It is this striving for something greater, whether it is to survive injustice, overcome oppression, or make meaning out of the incomprehensible it is in the shared human method of coping, (the shared striving) that one finds god, spirituality and humanity. Superiority striving might be how individuals came to god but the utilization of that source in the service to the interconnectedness of mankind is the ultimate form of connecting one’s self to something larger. So large that it is the shares human experience of God.

Social interest. Human beings are social creatures. Therefore it is necessary for people to be socially interested. Adler understood this as the universal goal of Social interest. An individual’s main task in life is to be in compassionate community with others. Cooperation is the key to social interest. “Social Interest can be thought of as referring to various attitudes the individual has and how the abilities or traits of the individual are employed in dealing with the
social world” (Manaster, Corsini, 1982, p. 44). Adlerian theory is well-suited for the Unconditional Forgiveness method, because it supports the social conventions and promotes individuals to become more socially interested. “Adler’s contribution to forgiveness is explained by Robert McBrien, a noted Adlerian Psychologist, as the relationship between forgiveness and social interest.” (McBrien, 2004, p. 411-412) Understanding social interest allows for a secular understanding of the spiritual dimensions of forgiveness. Meaningful healing is unlikely without the components of empathy and social interest. Worthington wrote, “Without empathy for the person who hurt us, we are unlikely to forgive” (Worthington, 1998, p. 63).

McBrien (2004) examines forgiveness models by how counselors encourage their clients to explore forgiveness. He advocates an Individual Psychology focused approach and suggests that if that model were tested it would prove beneficial to clients. McBrien echoes McCullough and Worthington’s call for “stronger forgiveness models backed by research offers scholars of Individual Psychology an opportunity to contribute to and strengthen this emerging psychology” (p. 418). The Unconditional Forgiveness method would likely be accepted as in accordance with Adlerian theories.

As McBrien indicates, spiritual connectedness is on the highest end of the Social Interest continuum. Forgiveness increases social interest and increases spiritual connectedness. When an individual is experiencing a forgiveness issue, the key to resolving that issue is to help the client integrate his/her thoughts, feelings and emotions in a holistic way. A holistic treatment of a forgiveness issue is one where the body, mind and spirit are activated in a therapeutic intervention. It is one in which a client can access feelings of empathy for his/herself and for another-namely the one he/she is forgiving. “The key to encouraging forgiveness in Adlerian psychotherapy is the client’s willingness to become more understanding, to have more
compassion, and to experience empathy for the offender.” In terms of Adlerian thinking, this would mean “living with social interest” (McBrien, 2004, p. 415)

**Interconnectedness.** It is necessary in forgiveness therapy for a client to connect to a source of unconditional love, an inner wise mind that will provide the source for encouragement. An unconditionally loving source that has an infinite source of good will and a well of positivity and hope can take many forms. This source is located within the clients’ mind and accessible to him/her through a spiritual connection and an awareness of an unconditionally loving and encouraging presence. “Adlerian counseling includes goals of developing social interest. With clients working in a forgiveness issue, these goals are expanded to include the fullest, that is, cosmic, expression of social interest” (McBrien, p. 415). A forgiveness issue is intrinsically linked to an issue of spirituality. In the book, Forgiveness: Theory, Research and Practice, edited by McCullough, Pargament and Thoresen. They compiled a number of forgiveness research including a study conducted by Rye and Pargament (1998), participants in group forgiveness interventions reported use of religious based forgiveness strategies, even if these strategies were not encouraged in the intervention (McCullough et al., 2008, p.18).

**Early Recollections**

The Unconditional Forgiveness method applies to Adlerian practice in that the early recollections, dreams, and the client’s forgiveness narrative can usually provide enough information to guide the therapist to arrive at some hunches as to the client’s style of living. “Early Recollections are stories of events that a person says occurred” (Mosak & Di Pietro, 2006, p. 1). Most often the stories are gathered about a time when the individual was under the age of 10 but in clinical work the assessment strategy can be expanded to other narratives like the forgiveness narrative. It is helpful to combine the forgiveness narrative and skills utilized in
Early Recollection interventions at the same time to get a deeper understanding of the private logic of the client and to gain insight as to why this particular event became a revenge or forgiveness issue.

**Inferiority Feelings**

Another Adlerian concept that fits with the Unconditional Forgiveness method is called Inferiority Feelings. Inferiority feelings are “an over stimulated striving for power which either finds its limits in the demands of society and in the admonitions of social interest, which is physiologically and socially founded, or goes astray” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 144). The state of unforgiveness is a state of inferiority. The unforgiving person is a discouraged person. The person with aggressive and vengeful thoughts is feeling defeated and is safeguarding against perceived flaws in themself. The individual is striving to overcome the feelings of inferiority brought about by the injustices committed by another person.

**Hesitating Attitude**

There are cases in which a person with a forgiveness issue is experiencing what Adlerians call a “Hesitating Attitude”; a Hesitating Attitude is a “fourfold modus of behaviors” that are employed by the client when they are struggling with inferiority. “We find the resultant combination of these two moods [the feelings of inferiority and the striving toward ‘above’] a neurotic constant back-and-forth, a half-and-half, the conduct of powerless exaltation, where at one time the trait of powerlessness, at another time the trait of exaltation becomes more prominent” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 273). The client seems to be reaching for a solution but also providing very good arguments as to why they will not succeed. When a client is in this attitude, the goal of the therapist is to make the client aware of the mistake he/she is making by allowing his/herself to becoming frozen in the forgiveness problem. The person who
needs to forgive is suffering, but the lack of movement toward forgiveness seems to absolve
him/her from the responsibility of becoming social engaged and contributing to social life in a
way that often prevents the client from creating meaningful relationships.

**Purposefulness of Behavior and Law of Movement**

When a person is in a state of unforgiveness, it is very difficult for the individual to see
his/her role in becoming personally responsible to resolve the negativity caused by
unforgiveness. This is because someone has completely shattered his/her guiding principle of
how the world “should” work. This loss or paradoxical experiences can be very discouraging to
an individual. The client needs to know that his/her principles are valuable and that his/her
needs for belonging, significance and safety will not be diminished if the person is forgiven. In
fact, the ability for the individual to feel a sense of belonging, significance and safety is often
improved as a result of forgiving. In Individual Psychology there are 12 basic principles. The
first, “There is one basic dynamic force behind all human activity, a striving from a felt minus
situation towards a plus situation, from a feeling in inferiority towards superiority, perfection,
totality” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 1). Therefore the Purposefulness of one’s behavior is
to move from a “felt minus” to a “perceived plus” that movement is under the control of the
client’s creative mind and is a unique expression of the client’s perception of superiority,
perfection and totality. The benefits to a client remaining in unforgiveness are many. And often
each needs to be addressed before a client will become ready to relinquish the forgiveness
charge. Individuals feel a real need for justice and retribution. He or she would like to see the
offender pay for what has been done, and maintain their status as above the transgression.
Another reason a client may cling to the forgiveness issue is that by continuing to blame or
charge the wrong doer the client remains superior over the transgressor as well as others who are
sympathetic to the issue. Clients may receive special treatment because of the forgiveness issue and he/she would not want to give up the benefits of that special treatment. Forgiveness narratives are sometimes used to manipulate others in the clients’ life; to gain favor or excuse them from full participation in the tasks of living.

Forgiveness therapy relates to the Adlerian concept of the Law of Movement. Unforgiveness is a state of avoidance, specifically avoiding solving a problem. It is a narrative that keeps the individual stuck in the conflict. It is the “Superiority Strivings” that keep the person with a forgiveness issue elevated in their self-perception of moral superiority even though the object of the forgiving may have participated in wrong acts, broken rules, or committed crimes. The question is. What purpose does unforgiveness serves for the individual who is suffering as a result of the behavior of another? This is by no means simple to sort out. But, Adlerians would agree, the movement does serve the purpose of the individual in some way.

Psychology of Use

The use of a personal “will” in the Unconditional Forgiveness method is similar to the Adlerian understanding of The Psychology of Use. In a book review written in the Journal of Individual Psychology, Thomas Allen (1973) wrote, “Assagioli provides a host of techniques for implementation of his theoretical premises. He spins out some interesting models and means for exploiting what can only be considered ‘a psychology of use.’ Recognizing the importance of emotions as fuel for action, i.e. ‘acts of will’” (Allen, p. 99). The Psychology of Use and the Use of the “will” correspond to the notion that individuals choose their course of action and emotional response in life. The client must commit to the idea that he/she is willing to forgive in order to participate in the method. The goal of the client and the therapist must center on the goal of forgiveness before the Unconditional Forgiveness intervention is used. If the client does
not have a goal of forgiving, then the intervention is inappropriate until a time when the client perceive forgiveness as a goal. Sometimes a great deal of psychoeducation and training about forgiveness is what is needed. The individual is helped by learning what forgiveness is and what it is not. The client needs to be aware of the possible benefits of being willing to forgive.

**Courage and Encouragement**

Courage also plays a significant role in the use of the Unconditional Forgiveness method. The individual has to find the inner resources to express the pain and disillusionment while also facing fear that the atrocity might happen again, and that they may not get their needs for safety and significance met. They need to reestablish new boundaries for themselves and have enough faith that their needs are valid and they deserve enough to have them met in a different and better way. The client will do this during the Unconditional Forgiveness method with the full understanding that he/she cannot change the other person (Grieco, 2011).

The Unconditional Forgiveness method is empowering. It helps the client to realize his/her personal needs, desires and wants have value. The client is able to separate themself from the act that caused the forgiveness issue. It gives the client permission to create a psychological boundary and give the responsibility of the transgression back to the person who is being forgiven. Therapeutic use of the Unconditional Forgiveness method removes the negatively charged feeling associated with the forgiveness story. The client will also able to be more compassionate and understanding of themselves, of the situation and the person they are forgiving. The Unconditional Forgiveness method places people in a mindset that is accepts imperfection. Embracing of Imperfection not only applies to the person being forgiven but also in the person doing the forgiving.
Adlerians work to teach their clients to become aware of the strivings of human kind. When individuals feel inferior they are in a state of disequilibrium and because they cannot allow for this feeling of inequality (B. L. Bettner, personal communication, July 26, 2012). They will need to counteract it by doing something to balance a “Less Than” state. The Unconditional Forgiveness method and Individual Psychology teach that it is the individual’s responsibility to hold their worth at an equal value of another.

It is a human challenge to honor the rights of others and to not allow the actions, behaviors and ideas of others to push them into a state of feeling inferior. Inferiority is not a thing or a state of being. It is a self-imposed response to something that challenges the perception of worth, lovability, or safety (B. L. Bettner, personal communication, July 26, 2012). When individuals claim his/her equal value and worthiness in community with others then they can escape the roller coaster feelings of inferiority and superiority striving with feelings of worthiness, belonging and service. This feeling of universal love is an empathetic understanding of the interconnectedness of all people.

In summery Adlerian principles can enhance the supplication of the Unconditional Forgiveness method by connecting the concepts of social interest and the spiritual goal of creating feelings that illustrate the interconnectedness of all people. And by enlightening the client about his/her false and fruitless goals of superiority over others and giving them the tools to claim his/her own worth and contribution to social life.

**Self-Encouragement Perspective and Unconditional Forgiveness Method**

By teaching the client how to forgive the clinician is teaching the client how to access the resource to become self-encouraging. The Unconditional Forgiveness method introduces a realm of interpersonal space that a client can learn to utilize in order to become more self-encouraging,
UNCONDITIONAL FORGIVENESS: AN ADLERIAN PERSPECTIVE

more socially interested and more skilled at relating to the needs of others and more connected to his/her own needs. This interpersonal space is in essence the source of what many come to know as a spiritual connection. Regardless of the framework and nomenclature used to conceptualize this level of awareness it is a shared experience within the range of human experiences. And it plays a key role in enhancing psychological well-being.

**How to Forgive: A Step-by-Step Intervention**

The Unconditional forgiveness Method is a step by step process for forgiving another person. There are three components to utilizing the intervention. The first is to educate the client about forgiveness. And introduce the method as a psychodrama therapeutic intervention. The second component is to work with the client to form a shared understanding of the interpersonal nomenclature used to discuss the client’s relationship with a source of unconditional love. The third component is to participate in the psychodrama where the clinician guides the client through the steps in an intense therapy session that will encourage the client to engage in an emotional release. The intense therapy session engages the client’s mental, emotional, physical and spiritual resources to heal themselves and be released from a forgiveness issue. During this process it is extremely helpful to have experienced practitioners’ guidance through the steps especially for first time users or for releasing very emotionally charged forgiveness issues. But once a person has had some practice and gotten to the bottom of some larger issues. Then the method can be utilized by the client without a practitioner’s guidance. A client will benefit from a self-guided forgiveness practice whenever a forgiveness issue arises in the future. The method can be used individually as a coping skill and, in individual therapy sessions and in a group setting. The steps are the same and the therapeutic process is also the same. The steps for a self-guided forgiveness practice are listed in Appendix a.
The client will then sit across from an empty chair. This chair may hold a picture of the offending person, a personal article of the client’s choice or simply ask the client to imagine the offending person there. Similar to the techniques used when asking a client to recall an early memory it is best if the client can recall some details to give the imagery more substance. Once the client establishes the forgivee in the other chair the method can begin. Sometimes the forgivee is not a person but an institution or a family system. If this is the case the clinician will need to be creative in helping the client hone the image of the transgressor in the empty chair. The care to which the clinician takes to set up the psychodrama enhances the Adlerian techniques used in establishing the therapeutic relationship.

**Step 1 - Starting with one’s will** (Grieco, 2011). In this step it is important to establish that the client is willing to forgive, to let this issue go. The use of the term “will” in this context relates to Psychosynthesis exercises to utilize a person’s inner resources to do something new and is more similar to Adlerian understanding of courage. “Using the “will” may at times involve effort and striving. It may run against our ingrained attitudes and habits. It may be a will that breaks through the barriers, that overcomes fear, that compels even the most improbable thing to happen” (Ferrucci, p. 94). The use of the term “will” is not to be confused with “willpower.” It is first a decision to do something. It is an intention and a promise to commit your inner resource to the task. There does not have to be one-hundred percent certainty that they will or can, but they must be at the place where they will say “I am willing to forgive this person for this thing.” This step is a good place to guide the client to ask his/her higher power to guide and help as they forgive this person. Once the willingness to forgive is in place he/she are ready for the next step. The Adlerian concept the “psychology of use” is paralleled in this step by making forgiveness a
goal of will. It calls upon all of the individuals resources to attain that goal. It is also an unconscious admission of the client that he/she is in charge of his/her emotional state.

**Step 2- Express the emotions about what happened.** (Grieco, 2011). This step is where the client speaks words of emotion. Emotional words such as anger, hostility, hatred and shame. This step may seem aggressive or even embarrassing to a client, but the clinicians can help him/her to understand that they are only words, and at this time, in this safe setting no one could be hurt by the words. Some clients will be better at expressing their emotions than others; each person is unique in the ways in which they give this step voice. Therapists must know their clients well enough to know if they can handle this level of emotional arousal and be able to bring it back down to a point of calmness. While the client speaks the words of emotion it is helpful to coach the client in using his/her body. It may be helpful to encourage the client to shake his/her fists, punch a pillow or tear paper as a physical release of the emotional tension that has gathered up energy in the body. This is an intense period of time when a client may need permission to swear and say things out loud that would otherwise be forbidden, or inappropriate to say out loud.

The therapist indicates that it is appropriate to let go because it is done in the spirit of community, and to bring the client into “right relationship” with the perpetrator of the forgiveness issue, with his/her self and with other people. The emotions of the individual are real and important to that person. They deserve to be spoken, let out into the world and be given their moment. The therapist should encourage the client to dig deep and touch the pain. This is a time to give the emotions their full depth of feeling and let them flow. It does not last long, it never does. The therapist should encourage him/her to stick with it and not retreat. The therapist could make encouraging statements like ‘it will get better” and “it is for a good purpose”.
Expressing the emotions is freeing the client who has suffered and releasing him/her from the power the forgiveness story has had on his/her life. Once a person has spoken all the emotions and accusations there will be a natural calming in his/her demeanor. At this point a clinician may know there might be some feeling or expectations that have not been given voice by the client. If that is the case the clinician should make therapeutic “hunches” or guesses at the feelings and expectations. It is important to remind the client that the time to release these expectations is now, and to lay it all out and get it over with. When the words are all spoken, then it is time to move to the next step. Adlerian psychology does not often focus on the individual’s emotions but rather on the goal to which the emotions motivate the individual. By allowing the client to fully express his/her emotions; these are often emotions that fuel feelings of superiority and disconnection. The feelings in the forgiveness narrative give the clinician a glimpse of the client’s private logic. Utilizing the private logic in following steps an Adlerian perspective would reflect back empathy and Social Interest and gently guide the individual back to the goal of social connection.

**Step 3 - Cancel the expectation(s) you are holding in your mind.**

The steps to achieving this are:

a. Shift expectation to positive preference

b. Acknowledge reality

c. Re-state your will to move on; open up to getting your needs met in a different way

d. Release the expectation with words and inner letting go (Paraphrased from Grieco, 2011, p. 81-83).

The therapist will take notes during the releasing of emotions because they will provide useful information to make sure a client has given every expectation its full expression when the
client is shifting the expectation to a positive statement. The client might need to be reminded of all the changed expectations being shifted. This is where an emotional charge like “How could you cheat on me, I was so good to you” might be shifted in a positive way to say, “I would have preferred that you would have been as faithful to me as I was to you.” “But you weren’t. And I will no longer suffer because you were unfaithful. I will open up to getting that need met another way. I release you from that expectation. What you did is on you and I own my part as well.” During this step it is important to guide the client to address each expectation with a positive preference. It might be difficult for the client to find the language for a positive preference as he/she has been holding a grudge for a while and may slip into the negative emotions again. A trained practitioner will help the client to find a positive preference that he/she will feel comfortable stating in his/her own words.

The shift to a preference is important in softening the client’s perspective and helping him/her to realize that his/her needs are important and that his/her preferences are valid but that the means he/she previously tried to get them met did not work and there may be another way for that need to be met. It is a paradoxical shift that takes time to integrate. During that integration the clinician will help the client to visualize the expectations melting away. For example the clinician will encourage the client to clench and unclench fists to soften his/her shoulders to relax the body. The therapist will encourage the client to “let their heart lift,” as if in a yoga pose. This type of cueing is to involve the body. It is to help the client become aware of the emotional shift as it relates to the way his/her body feels. Guiding the client to receive the warmth and healing energy to enter the spaces that were tight and holding the resentment, further seals in the awareness that something has shifted. This relates to the Adlerian concept of the Holistic
treatment of a person. It is Holistic because it connects the individual to the outside world, to his/her inner world, in his/her body and to the role of emotions (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956).

**Step 4 - Open up to the universe to receive exactly what you need** (Grieco, 2011). This step is where the therapist helps the client to state his/her needs out loud and to declare that he/she is open to getting his/her needs met in another way. Visualizing his/her words going out into the universe and picturing a healing light coming into his/her body can help the client accomplish this important step. Reinforcing the client’s needs as valuable and deserving, and introducing the idea that he/she can meet this need in a different and better way. This opening to the universe is connecting the client to the relationship that he/she has to living in community to others. That every individual is interconnected and our needs are only met if we engage in the reciprocal relationship of Social Interest.

**Step 5 - Sort out the boundaries** (Grieco, 2011). In this step the therapist helps the client to give back the responsibility for the injustice to the transgressor and for the client to acknowledge his/her own actions and responsibility. The therapist will instruct the client to visualize his/her personal space like a sphere of light, encouraging him/her to use his/her body to symbolically claim the space. The therapist asks the client to show where his/her sphere is. Saying words like, “imagine your sphere whole and separate.” Aid the client in using imagery to push away any blame or negative connections between themselves and the object he/she is forgiving. Physically, this may look like the client is waving his/her hands, pushing something away. It may resemble a cutting or chopping motion with the arms which may represent the breaking of ties that have kept him/her bound to this point. The therapist allows this to be as dramatic as it needs to be in order for the client to feel the emotional shackles release. Adlerian therapy encourages individuals to claim his/her own worth and equality in the world. McBrien
UNCONDITIONAL FORGIVENESS: AN ADLERIAN PERSPECTIVE

(2004) makes a connection to the social spiritual nature of forgiveness, and also points to the physical and emotional shift that takes place after forgiveness is experienced. “Social interest can be placed on a continuum with a low to high range. Low levels of social interest are associated with discouragement and poor mental health. An investigation of the high end of this continuum leads to the awareness that the highest levels have a spiritual dimension. Spirituality, as the highest form of social interest, is described in terms of cosmic social interest.” (McBrien, 2004, p. 411) This step is a physical representation of the client giving ceremony to that concept.

**Step 6 - Send unconditional love** (Grieco, 2011). Step six the therapist encourages the client to send unconditional love to the other person. This step is aided by using the imagery of the client’s spiritual or unconditional love model to help the client picture the offending person receiving unconditional love. Sometimes this visualization might come from the client’s understanding of the love of his/her higher power, or universal love or an understanding of human nature. An Adlerian perspective would be that it is the “Deed not the doer” that is unacceptable. As long as the therapist and the client have done the therapeutic work ahead of time this language should be established in order to make the sentiment feel true to the client. The client is encouraged to correct and claim his/her own understanding in his/her own words. Adlerian theory provides hope and tactics for avoiding inferiority strivings, by allowing the client to embrace imperfection. This step connects the client to an acceptance of his/her imperfection and the imperfection of others. It helps to guide the client to compassion for his/herself and embraces a shared humanity (Grieco, 2011).

**Step 7 - See the good in them or in the situation** (Grieco, 2011). The person should be able to connect with something good about the situation or the person. The client may need prompting to find something, but this is an important step and should not be over looked. Even if
the only good thing about the other person seems superficial it should highlight his/her humanness. This step further deepens the client’s connection to Social Interest and empowers the client to make new meaning out of what happened.

**Step 8 - See the good in what has the client learned** (Grieco, 2011). In step eight, the client is encouraged to see the good in what he/she has learned. To see what is new and different, and to make meaning out of what just happened so that a new meaning that can be attached to the situation being forgiven. He/she should take time and notice the physical change and to gently integrate it. It takes time to integrate new coping strategies and give up old habits This step is an opportunity for the client to fully feel the benefits of becoming more open to community connection and to the shifting of his/her strivings of superiority over the situation to claiming his/her self-worth and connection. This is affirming and encouraging to the client.

**Implications for Practitioners**

The Unconditional Forgiveness Method works with people of all ages, and relationship qualities. The method applies whether the person being forgiven is alive or dead. The process is the same regardless of how long the forgiveness issue had persisted. Twenty years or twenty days the Unconditional Forgiveness is applicable and effective. It is appropriate training for couples and families. The method can also be extended to more global injustices. A person can forgive an airline, an ex-employer, a dysfunctional family system or an oppressive social system. The method is as adaptable as the clinician’s skill and imagination. It is enhanced by Adlerian principle and meets the clients “where they are.” it builds upon the clients level of social connection and works to enhance social connection and decrease feelings of inferiority. The Unconditional Forgiveness method works in individual session. The forgiveness work is often enhanced when done in a group setting. The effects are lasting and the treatment is Democratic
in that it is a life skill that the client can take with them after they learn the technique. It is a practical method that creates and equality in the client therapist relationship. The Unconditional Forgiveness Method is being taught to professionals in all areas of social services including nursing, social work, therapists, coaches and clergy and ministerial counseling. The Unconditional Forgiveness method is a quick and effective way to address grief and unmet expectations and assumptions a client may have trouble resolving on their own.

**Conclusion**

Current research on forgiveness reveals that forgiveness benefits the client in many ways. Psychological and physical, it improves interpersonal relationships and restores the individual’s sense of worth and value. Much effort has been put into finding a collaborative and full definition of forgiveness. This fully developed concept of forgiveness has helped to push forgiveness research forward and improved forgiveness therapy. Clients benefit from a having the definition that they can conceptualize and explore in relationship to their own beliefs and possible misgivings. Medical doctors and therapist alike can see the improvements possible by psychoeducation to help cultivate a forgiving heart. Forgiveness is a valuable and important therapeutic intervention. The Unconditional Forgiveness Method adds to the range of choices when working with individuals and groups. The Unconditional Forgiveness Method is compatible with Adlerian methodologies. The Unconditional Forgiveness method is an effective method for expanding social interest to its fullest expression of cosmic social interest. Clients can benefit from the method by increasing his/her understanding of forgiveness. Become more forgiving and gain the insight and resources to forgive in the future. The Unconditional Forgiveness Method is a step-by-step method that can be taught and learned. It is a life skill that the client will be able to adopt and utilize in the future.
In the article Expanding Social Interest Through Forgiveness McBrien requests, that a more Individual Psychology focused model for forgiveness therapy that has been tested would even further be of benefit to clients. McBrien echoes “McCullough and Worthington’s call for stronger forgiveness models backed by research offers scholars of Individual Psychology an opportunity to contribute to and strengthen this emerging psychology” (p. 418). The Unconditional Forgiveness method would make a worthy candidate for further research as an Individual Psychology focused model. There may also be a call for a new term for forgiveness. One that addresses the process especially integrated in the Unconditional Forgiveness method. The Unconditional Forgiveness method is a holistic model that goes beyond forgiveness and transforms the individual. It provides a path out of shame and grief and heals the individual.
References


Bettner, B. L. (July, 2012). “the Crucial C’s”, at the symposium conducted at the International Committee for Adlerian Summer Schools. Druskininkai, Lithuania.


Appendix

a.

1) denial, repression and projection. 2) Shame. 3) Guilt. 4) Systematic cognitive rehearsal. 5) Cost-benefits- comparison with wrong doer. 6) Circular reaction/cognitive confusion to evaluate the happening. 7) The realization will affect the victim’s view of justice in the world. 8) Decision Phase. 9) Evaluate alternatives. 10) Decide context, justice, forgiveness or both. 11) Reframe, help the victim but not release the offender from justice. 12) Understand the causes and events. 13) Empathy and Compassion for the situation. 14) Empathy and Compassion toward the offender. 15) Requires the victim to feel the hurt and take responsibility for the not passing it to others to “absorb” the pain. 16) Realize that they are imperfect and ask for forgiveness in other circumstances. 17) Recognition that acknowledging their imperfection creates a sense of belonging. 18) Allowing a new meaning to life emerge. 19) Expression of compassion and a reclaiming of well-being by showing a new attitude of compassion and love. 20) Reconciliation may be possible if voluntarily chosen.

b.

The Eight Steps of the Unconditional Forgiveness method; Forgiveness of Another

The eight steps are listed below simply as a set of instructions

1. State your will to make a change in attitude.
Search your heart and find the willingness to forgive. The willingness to let the situation go. Find the place in your knowing that will help you to do this and say out loud. “I will forgive ---- person for ----.

2. Express your emotions about what happened.

Speak out loud in detail what the other person had don’t to you. Say with all you emotions how you have been harmed. Speak how others have been harmed. This is not the time to be compassionate or understanding: you will do that later. This is the time to be emotional, to be angry and to give each and every emotion its full time and expression. Remember suppressed and emotions that have been labeled unacceptable are the ones that have been holding you hostage in the pain of unforgiveness. Speak them now. Feel them fully, cry, scream, and yell. Wave your arms. Shake your fist. Punch a pillow or demolish some tissue paper. It is your day to do this and do it fully, get to the bottom of what hurts. It won’t last long.

Try not to leave anything out, before moving to the next step.

When you have emptied your body of the emotional pain and suffering you will know you have done so. Something will shift and you will feel a settling sensation and calm. The you will know you can move to the next step.

3. Cancel the expectation(s) you are holding in your mind

List one at a time, then

a. Shift expectation to positive preference

“Say something like I would have wished that you would have done—“

b. Acknowledge reality
“But you did not”

c. Re-state your will to move on

“And I am willing to move on; I will no longer suffer”

d. Release the expectation with words and inner letting go

Hold the idea of the expectation becoming their responsibility and use your arms to make of gesture of giving them the energy of the expectation. Let the word I am willing to move on and I will no longer suffer wash over you and sink into your awareness. Make it true absorb the words.

- 4. Sort out the boundaries: give them responsibility for their actions and take yours;

  visualize your personal space like a sphere of light around you. Visualize their personal space.

  State out loud that you are giving them full responsibility for the wrongs they have committed. Visualize your own personal space and use any movements to symbolize the giving over of responsibility and the cutting of ties that have kept you connected until now.

- 5. Open up to the Universe to receive exactly what you need

  Your needs and the things you were expecting are important. Speak out loud your intentions to have those needs met in another way. Say” I really would have preferred x but that did not happen and I open up to the universe* to get my needs met in another way. *you may insert whatever term you feel most comfortable with here. Speak all you needs now and be open to having those met in new and unknowable ways.

- 6. Send unconditional love to the person
Imagine a sphere of light above you head full of universal love a light and compassionate source of good in the world. Send your wishes for a connected and compassionate world. Send universal love into that sphere. And imagine the energy of that love pushing out into the world and connecting to the person you are forgiving. With a compassionate heart we see their mistakes and we hold with an open hand that we may not condone the deed but the person is still worthy of compassion.

- 7. See the good in them or in the situation, see the good of having done the therapeutic work you have done. Say out loud what was good. Reflect on what you may have learned about yourself. What might have been good about the other person, and what was good about the work you just did.

- 8. Notice the physical change, take time to see where in your body you feel different and take time to gently integrate it. Breathe into the new spaces of relaxation. Notice the emotional release, note what it feels like and let it sink in. State out loud what you will do with the new more positive emotional energy you have just created.

Give the method time to sink in (a few days) if old patterns of the forgiveness narrative pop back in to your head, remind yourself of the commitment you made to letting the story go and replace the feelings with ones of gratitude for the courage you had to deal with the situation once and for all (Mary Hayes Grieco, web resource http://www.maryhayesgrieco.com/forgiveness/forgive.asp#eightsteps).