

LIVE DEMONSTRATION OF THE FORGIVENESS LETTER

A

Okay, let's begin. [Name of B], who did you write your Fourth Step Inventory Long Form on?

B

My mom.

A

Okay, good. Please read the letter from your mom just as you wrote it.

B

Dear [Name of B],

First, let me tell you how much I love you. You were always so special to me. When you were growing up, I loved watching you dance and sing. You were quite the entertainer.

I want to apologize to you, my dear (B), for all the times I was not there for you, for all the times I was in a drunken stupor and could not see what was going on in your life. I am sorry I was not there to protect you from your overly strict and abusive teacher and that I could not see how hard you were trying to be a good child. I am sorry that I taught you things that hurt you and made you feel inadequate.

I would never want to hurt you. I love you. I am so sorry for my inability to see you and understand what was going on for you. Can you forgive me for abandoning you?

If there is something I can do to make this right with you, please let me know. I want all to be right with us going forward.

Love,

Mom

A

Thank you. How does it feel to hear this apology?

B

I feel good. I have always wanted her to see that she hurt me by not being there for me.

A

Thank you. In this situation, what roles did you cast your Mom in?

B

I cast her in the role of abandoner, of an unfit mother. As someone who didn't love me enough to protect me.

A

Thank you. What roles did you cast yourself in?

B

The lost child. The victim of abuse by my teacher. The good child who is not being validated. Someone unworthy of my mother's attention.

A

Thank you. What roles did the other person cast you in?

B

Someone who didn't need protection. Someone doing okay without her. Someone she didn't need to worry about.

A

Thank you. As far as you can observe, what roles did your mother cast herself in?

B

Someone barely holding it together. Someone who was trying to be a good mother and teach her child how to be good and how to get to Heaven. Someone who wants the best for her child.

A

Thank you. Now read the letter again and this time read it as if this is the apology letter YOU wrote to your mom. **Hint:** Keep it simple and clear when changing words and keep it as close to the original letter as possible.

B

I will read the same letter as if I wrote it to my Mom, changing words and phrases to fit her and the situation.

Dear Mom,

First, let me tell you how much I love you. You have always been so special to me, even when I didn't show it. When I was growing up, I loved watching you bake cookies and plan holidays. You were quite the cook, and you loved making holidays special.

I want to apologize to you, my dear Mother, for all the times I was not there for you, for all the times I was in a Media blackout and a self-absorbed fantasy stupor and could not see what was going on in your life. I am sorry I was not able to tell you about my strict and abusive teacher at school and that I could not see how hard you were trying to be a good Mom. I am sorry that I believed things that hurt you and made you feel guilty for them and inadequate.

I would never want to hurt you. I love you. I am sorry for my inability to see you and understand what was going on for you. Can you forgive me for abandoning you?

If there is something I can do to make this right with you, please let me know. I want all to be right with us going forward.

Love,

(B)

A

Thank you. How does it feel to give this apology?

B

I feel sad. I can see that I didn't see her either. I didn't see what she was going through. I can see that I didn't trust her enough to tell her about my school teacher and how afraid I was. I can also see how much she did for the family and how she made the holidays awesome. Basically, I can see that it was not all bad. There were a lot of good times too.

A

Thank you. As you reread it, did you notice if you still cast the other person in the same role as before?

B

No, I was beginning to see her as more loving than I had remembered. She was there for me more than I gave her credit for. I think this time, I cast her in the role of caring mother rather than abandoning mother.

A

Thank you. Did you notice if you were in the same role you cast yourself before?

B

No. I can see where I hurt my mom—that I abandoned her, that I didn't see her, that I didn't appreciate her or really know what she was going through. I can see that I was in a media stupor—that I was a drunk too, that I wanted to escape too. I can see that I was just like her.

A

Thank you. Does this situation look any different to you from this perspective?

B

It does, though it's hard to admit it. I still feel like she should have been there for me because I was the child, and she was the parent, but I think I'm looking at it with more adult eyes now. I can see that she was doing the best she could, given everything that was going on in her life. I can see that she loved me, even though I wanted her to show it in a different way. I can also see that I punished her for not being the mother I wanted and that my behavior towards her hurt her.

A

Thank you. Now read the letter again and this time read it as if this apology letter is a letter YOU wrote to YOURSELF. Please slow it down so you can really FEEL your apology.

B

I will read a letter that I wrote to myself, changing some words to make it clear what I did to me.

Dear (B),

First, let me tell you how much I love you. You have always been so special to me. When we were growing up, I loved watching us dance and sing. We were quite the entertainers!

I want to apologize to you, (B) for all the times I was not there for you—for all the times I was in a media-drunken stupor and could not see what was going on in your inner and outer life. I am sorry I was not there to protect you from the strict, abusive teacher by either speaking up or finding adult support and that I could not see how hard you were trying to be good but instead repeatedly told you how bad you were. I am sorry that I told you things about yourself that hurt you and made you feel inadequate.

I would never want to hurt you. I love you. I am so sorry for my inability to see you and understand what was going on for you. Can you forgive me for abandoning you by not letting you be your authentic self?

If there is something I can do to make this right with you, please let me know. I want all to be right with us going forward.

Love,

(B)

A

Thank you. How does it feel to give this apology to yourself?

B

It feels personal. It feels like I am now really getting in touch with myself and seeing how I don't love myself enough, how I abandon myself, and how much my self-talk is abusive and unkind. I did always tell myself how bad I was. I never let myself off the hook. I shamed myself all the time. I never stood up for myself.

A

Thank you. As you reread it did you notice any recurring roles that you have played out with yourself?

B

Dictator. Abuser. Strict disciplinarian. Abandoner. Never satisfied with who I am. Shaming myself.

A

Thank you. Did you notice more deeply how you have limited yourself with these roles?

B

Yes, I am harder on myself than anyone else. I abandoned myself by not speaking up and by not allowing myself to feel worthy. I don't validate myself, and I expect other people to do that for me. This limits my ability to take care of myself and be happy.

A

Thank you. Does this situation look any different to you from this perspective?

B

Yes. I can see that when it comes to hurting myself, I do it better than anyone else. I can see that others are not as hard on me as I am on myself. I can see that I need to find ways to be kinder and more loving to myself.

A

Thank you. Now, let's do some recasting. What roles can you recast the other person in that would serve you both?

B

I think I am going to say, "loving mother," because she was loving. She did the best she could. She still is trying to make me happy.

A

Thank you. What roles can you recast yourself in that would serve you, the other person, and the world?

B

Resourceful adult. A good parent to myself. Compassionate and understanding of myself. A nurturing, loving, forgiving friend. I could be the kind of mother to myself I wanted my mother to be for me.

A

Thank you, B.

[This ends the demonstration.]