

Parenting Tools:

- Forgiveness -



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Parenting Tools: *Forgiveness*

At 8-years-old, kids are moving out of the egocentric stage and are beginning to consider others. They begin to place a high importance on friendships and may begin developing very close friendships. This is an opportune time to focus on teaching forgiveness.

Forgiveness requires children to set their pride aside and lower their defenses. Forgiveness can be a challenge for kids this age, even for an offense that seems as trivial as name-calling. As parents, we have to teach our children forgiveness. We can go straight to the Word for guidance and direction. Who better for our kids to learn a lesson in forgiveness from than God himself? 1 John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Use this verse to remind your kids that in the same way that Jesus forgave our sins though we didn’t deserve it, we can learn to forgive others with God’s help. You can help teach your children forgiveness by talking through the following questions and learning from Jesus’ example of forgiveness:

- **Who should we forgive?** We should forgive anyone who hurts us. Explain to your kids how we are encouraged by Scripture to forgive others by following the Lord’s example. The story of Jesus hanging on the cross, forgiving those around Him is a great story to read through with your children (you can find this story in Luke 23). If Jesus could forgive those who had hurt Him so deeply, then can’t we forgive the one who pushed us on the playground last week or called us a name?

• **How many times should we forgive?** “Then Peter came to Him and said, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’

Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven,’” says Matthew 18:21–22. Explain to your child that forgiveness is a reoccurring action in our lifetime. We will have to forgive minor and major offenses from strangers as well as those closest to us throughout our lives. If a child can learn forgiveness at a young age, he or she will be more likely to live a life full of healthy relationships.

• **What if we choose not to forgive?** Children also need to know the consequences of choosing not to forgive someone. They need to be made aware of the damage their unforgiveness can do, not only to their relationship with the offender, but also with God. Be sure to explain how unforgiveness directly affects our relationship with God. As we hold on to anger and hurt, those heavy emotions make it difficult for us to feel the Holy Spirit’s nudges and hear God’s voice in our lives. Unforgiveness leads to bitterness, and bitterness can take a toll on the physical body as well as emotional state. Explain and model how unforgiveness is not from God. Reflect on Ephesians 4:32, “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”

Show your child through your own life how wonderful forgiving one another can be. If you have a small spat with your spouse or one of your children, show your children how when you forgive, it has a very liberating effect, mending hurts and bringing you closer to the other person.

All offenses are not the same, and some are much harder to forgive than others. Learning to forgive is an ongoing lesson for children

and adults, but teaching children the importance of forgiveness while they are young will set them on the right path and provide a foundation of teaching opportunities and healthy relationships in the future.