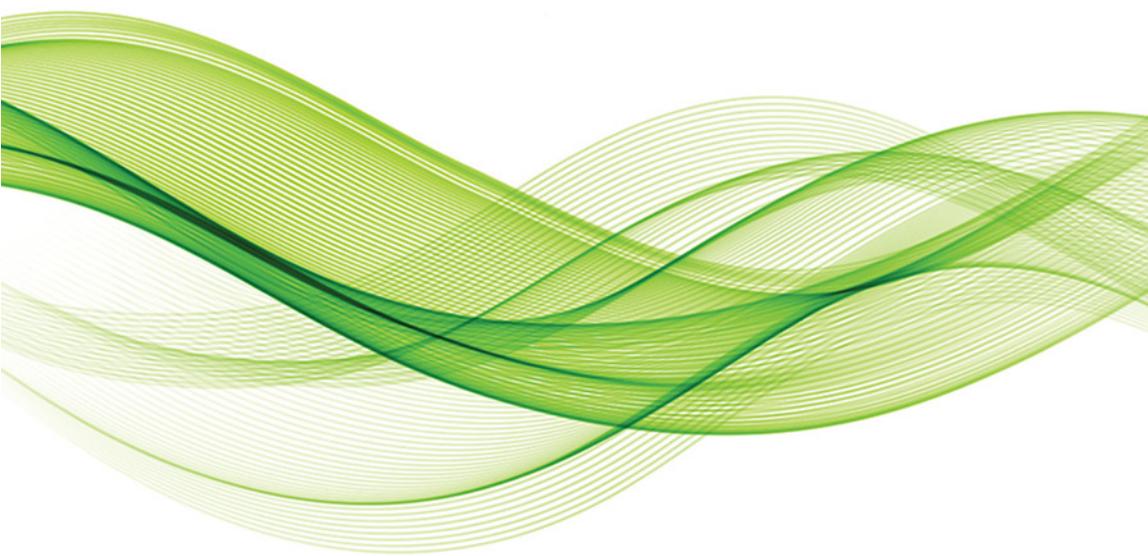


FAMILIES AND FORGIVENESS

Healing Wounds in the Intergenerational Family

SECOND EDITION



TERRY D. HARGRAVE AND
NICOLE E. ZASOWSKI



Families and Forgiveness

Families and Forgiveness, Second Edition gives the therapist a working knowledge of the importance of love and trustworthiness, skills to adequately assess hurt and pain in a family, and different techniques and conceptualizations to help family members move to make progress in restoring function to broken identities and senses of safety. The authors consistently demonstrate that the work of forgiveness—in any form—is possible with every family member and improves the intergenerational health of the family. In this new edition, a reorganized structure efficiently brings the therapeutic focus on love and trustworthiness, and revised case studies and updated interventions provide mental health professionals with practical methods to treat troubled families.

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Second edition published 2017
by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

and by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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First edition published by Routledge 1994

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Names: Hargrave, Terry D., author. | Zasowski, Nicole E.

Title: Families and forgiveness: healing wounds in the intergenerational family / by Terry D. Hargrave and Nicole E. Zasowski.

Description: Second edition. | New York, NY : Routledge, 2016. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016021502 | ISBN 9781138121843 (hardback : alk. paper) | ISBN 9781138121850 (pbk. : alk. paper) | ISBN 9781315650708 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Forgiveness. | Families. | Interpersonal communication. | Intergenerational relations. | Family psychotherapy. | Intergenerational communication.

Classification: LCC BF637.F67 H37 2016 | DDC 362.82/86—dc23LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2016021502>

ISBN: 978-1-138-12184-3 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-138-12185-0 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-65070-8 (ebk)

Typeset in Avenir and Dante
by diacriTech, Chennai

To my loving and trustworthy parents, Charley and Janice

Terry D. Hargrave

*To my husband, Jimmy. You are the greatest chapter of my story. To my
parents, Chuck and Gigi. I am grateful for the love and trust you have built
in our family.*

Nicole E. Zasowski

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Preface

Families, no matter how damaging they are and appear, also have resources and strengths. We unapologetically carry this belief as one of our fundamental tenets in therapeutic practice. We have seen it in many ways in many different people. A young mother who came from a family where she was raped by her father and then thrown out by her mother seeks to nurture her new husband and baby with responsible tenderness. A husband who was physically abused as a child seeks help whenever he feels himself losing control of his temper to the point where he might become abusive with his own family. A poor and uneducated woman in an abusive relationship works two jobs so her daughter can attend a special private school to get a better education. These are just a few of the many stories that we see everyday where people overcome tremendous obstacles with seemingly little going for them. In reality, however, these people tap into a powerful energy that seems common to humankind: the ability to love and be trustworthy. Certainly not all people tap the resource. We also see many families and people that are irresponsible and use hate as a daily method of retaliation as they pass destructive tendencies from one generation to the next. Even in these situations, however, we believe the resource and the energy—however meager—are somewhere in the individuals and families. People are not only hurt through relationships; they are also healed by relationships.

Nowhere do we see this fundamental belief about family strength more evident than in the work of forgiveness. The very family situations which produced violations of love and trustworthiness are “turned around” to restore and nurture the very heart of what was damaged in its members. It is in the salvage and restoration effort in the family where we think the resources and

the strengths of the group are most evident. We have come to this belief in family strengths not only because of what we see in the therapy room, but because we have seen the resources tapped in our own families. There were times when I (Terry) thought my own family was a lost cause and would “fly apart at the seams”; it not only survived but also came together in a stronger way that I thought possible. There were times in my own life (Nicole) where I thought the anxiety and pain of the past would cause me to isolate or push away the very people that I wanted to be closest to. It was these powerful changes in therapy and in our own families that continues to convince us of the therapeutic value of forgiveness.

Much has changed in the work of forgiveness from when the first edition of this text was written two decades ago. Initially in the 1980s, forgiveness was not considered a psychological intervention at all, but rather a religious concept for those who had a spiritual bend. But there were bold pioneers in the psychological and marriage and family therapy fields such as Robert Enright, Rich Fitzgibbons, Everett Worthington, Fred DiBlassio, and Lewis Smeedes, who began to explore the work of forgiveness from a strengths-based framework that could heal family relationships and individual trauma. I (Terry) was proud to be part of this early work on the strengths of forgiveness from the marriage and family therapy perspective. Mine was a clinical perspective, meaning that it was a model and methodology that I found worked in therapy settings for people looking for answers on how to make progress in dealing with pain in their lives. The work progressed in our fields and today there is a verbose literature on not only the therapeutic work of forgiveness but also the correlates and benefits of forgiveness. Forgiveness is not only accepted as a therapeutic methodology, it is a stalwart of predictive correlates for positives in relationships, individual health, marital success, and family strength. I have intended to revise this book for years, but there always seemed to be a press in other projects. Finally, however, the strength of the approach has been emphasized through the clinical model of Restoration Therapy. The time simply seemed right to update the approach with additional understanding of pain, how forgiveness works with integrity, as well as other techniques that we have found work well in the therapy room. I asked one of my former students, dear friend and brilliant therapist Nicole Zasowski, to come along with me and update the text. As a result, we now have an updated version of the work that still holds the best of the original work while adding the modifications and important changes that evolved through the years.

It is still important to realize that this book is *one* conceptualization of the forgiveness process. We do not maintain or expect that it should be the only

way people can or should think about the issue. It is simply *one* method of examining a very complex and heavy therapeutic process that we, and many of our clients and colleagues, have found helpful in the healing, salvage, and restoration of family after severe violations of love and trustworthiness have occurred in the intergenerational family.

If there has been anything that we have continued to learn through working with families dealing with forgiveness it is that it is difficult work that is hammered out in a process. Although there are many clinical examples in the literature to the contrary, most of us do not experience forgiveness as a “once and for all event” that happens at a place and time where all issues are resolved completely. Most of us forgive and then go about the process of working out forgiveness as we experience love and trustworthiness where we once experienced violation. The four stations of forgiveness are not stages or prescriptions; they are places along the road where most of us wander between them in our quest to make our past and ourselves whole.

No work such as this, even in a revision, is ever accomplished without significant contribution from many people. We first want to express our special thanks and appreciation to the many individuals and families that have demonstrated true commitment and caring in dealing with past pain. They have inspired us by their courage and taught us with their work to forgive. Also, to our spouses, Terry’s wife Sharon and Nicole’s husband Jimmy, we extend our gratitude for their patience and encouragement in moving these ideas out of our personal experience into this iteration of the therapeutic approach. I (Nicole) want thank my parents, Chuck and Gigi. I am grateful for all of their efforts in creating a new legacy in our family. As I prepare for the birth of my first child, I feel more thankful now than ever before for the love and sense of safety their parenting has built into me, and the many ways this will shape my parenting with my own son. Finally, for me (Terry) personally, I wish to express my love and gratitude to my parents, Charley and Janice. Still, even 20 years after the original work was finished, they still have proven to be loving teachers on how to restore and redeem brokenness and access the resources that I hardly realized existed in my family. One day when I rock, cuddle, and love my grandchildren in a loving and trustworthy manner, I will continue to be thankful for the heritage they have passed along that enables me to give in such a way.

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Section I

The Therapeutic Work of Forgiveness

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The Roots of Pain

1

As a species, we are enormously blessed with the ability to heal physically. But even as tenacious as human life is, we are remarkably vulnerable to injury, disease, and death. Emotionally and relationally, we also have amazing resilience. It is our families that build this resource of resilience by assuring us that they indeed love us and they can be trusted. Relationships and emotional damage can be held in check if there is a resource of love and trust. No matter how irresponsible the act, how harsh the anger, how hideous the ramifications in the family, relationships survive when people are loved and trusted. On the other hand, in families where the resource of love and trust is depleted, relational and emotional energy drain is almost a foregone conclusion; it does not matter how insignificant the act, how innocent the remark, or how minor the damage.

We have a fundamental belief in family, relationships, and the work of love and trustworthiness. We believe that when love and trustworthiness are repaired or even restored, the effects can reach into the relationships of the family—any family—and heal the damaged past in such a way that the precious sense of identity and safety can be returned to individual members. This repair and restoration of love and trustworthiness is rightly called, in our opinions, the work of forgiveness, and it is what this book is about. Forgiveness, because it has ramifications on the past and the future of relationships, is a long road of tough work with many potential risks. But accomplishing the work of forgiveness is perhaps one of the supreme manifestations of relationship because it has to involve the work of at least two people willing to trust and rebuild their relationship, even after severe damage.

The landscape of forgiveness is substantially different than when the first edition of this book was written. At the time, there was almost global confusion

4 Therapeutic Work of Forgiveness

among families and therapists alike concerning its accomplishment. Many believed, for instance, forgiveness carried too many indictments of guilt and religious decrees to be useful in therapy. Others were concerned that forgiveness was just an “optic trick” of letting a relational victimizer “off the hook” for irresponsible and damaging behavior. But what many others and we have found in the two decades of therapy involving forgiveness is that it is not only an effective intervention with positive individual outcomes, but also a powerful vortex where the family past and future can be changed simultaneously for the better.

The type of therapy that we explain in this book, of course, is not the only methodology or technique involving forgiveness. But we can safely say that the work of forgiveness outlined here is one full of integrity that gives meaning to the action, protection to the victim and victimizer, and respect to the power of relationship. Our belief is family members are hurt by relationships and are eventually healed by relationships. Family is powerful because it holds the first relationships we engage in and essentially all we learn about the world and ourselves is influenced by the family. It is powerful for tremendous good, but unfortunately, those same relationships can do tremendous harm and damage. But even after harm and damage, there is hope through forgiveness that things can once again be good. This good does not come about, however, through the magic of just “letting go” of the past any more than “letting time pass” in order to heal wounds. Forgiveness is intentional and has integrity. Let us be clear what we mean when we say forgiveness: *forgiveness is the process by which love and trust are re-established and restored in relationships.* Forgiveness is not about simple proclamations about not dwelling on the past. It is not about just living in silence, fear, resentment, or pain about the past because we do not know how to make relationships different. It is certainly not about subjecting ourselves or a client to continued irresponsible violations from a relationship in an unproductive barter that we must “take the bad with the good.” Forgiveness is about responsible and thoughtful concepts and behavior that work to heal brokenness with love and trustworthiness.

A wise friend and professor, Glen Jennings, used to say, “All research and clinical work comes from your gut.” Certainly, the work of forgiveness that we teach as a clinical methodology here comes from our own “gut” and experiences of life. These ideas of forgiveness have been “test driven” in our own families. The stations of forgiveness and process—insight, understanding, giving the opportunity for compensation, and the overt forgiveness—include not only stories of the therapeutic journeys of clients, but also our journeys with our own family groups.

Comets, Love, and Trustworthiness in Terry's Family

In 1948, in the vast coldness of space and a little past the orbit of the planet Neptune, an almost imperceptible turn of the great comet Halley changed its direction from extension outward from the solar system inward toward its 1985–86 apparition. It was this gentle turn inward that guaranteed Halley would continue to fulfill its promise and tradition to humanity. The turn of this stale dirty snowball only a few miles in diameter directed Halley to its regular fruition when its brilliant coma would be one of the brighter objects in the night sky and its tail would stretch for millions of miles across the solar system. Its fiery torch that has appeared approximately every 75 years for centuries has marked the time to generations as they bask in its beauty, remember its history, and even fear its omens.

A little less than a year later, a barely witnessed generational turn took place on the plains of New Mexico when my parents eloped, married, and started my family. My father, Charley Bevard, was the tenth of twelve children having grown up in a depression family that clung to existence after his father lost his arm in a railroad accident. They moved to a homestead in New Mexico on some parched land they tried to farm and continued the struggle as each child left home to try to improve his or her lot in life. My mother, Lola Janice, was the oldest of five children. Her family ranched and she, like her mother and her grandmother before her, fought and argued consistently with her mother as she tried to break free of oppressive expectations and find her own place and personality. In a state of fear, she took my father up on his marriage proposal, because she could not face telling her father that she had got in trouble at school and had been sent home early. My father, because he was older after spending time in the service and because he was in love, more than heartily agreed to the marriage. The same day, they loaded up in a car with a couple of friends to witness the affair and started their lives together. Very quick and very unplanned, the generational turn was achieved and my family life course was set.

Along this new course, my parents would have four children in six and a half years. I was the youngest of these four. As one might expect, my parents struggled to maintain existence while they finished growing up together. When I was four, my mother made the courageous decision to take her high school equivalency exam and start college to be a teacher. My father took two jobs and tenaciously worked my mother through college until she had secured a public teaching position. Then in turn, my mother worked my father through his degree as a science teacher. Although my family struggled, we never were

hungry and seldom went without things we wanted or needed. But there was something that was desperate in my family that was very difficult for me: My sister fought and argued with my mother much in the same way that my mother struggled with hers and at age 18, my sister eloped to marry a man with whom she had only had a few dates; my oldest brother became alienated from the family and after several years of tension and threats drifted into the service and marriage; my next brother struggled with fitting in at college and being recognized for his own uniqueness. I experienced tasks as overwhelming and felt incompetent and wondered if I was loved. Family, siblings included, was not quite to be trusted. Love was scarcely mentioned. The intent of family, as far as I could tell, was to survive until you were out on your own. There was a family pain that everyone in my household felt, but no one could quite articulate. Something was desperately wrong.

As I articulate it now, I realize my parents were immature, manipulative, relationally unstable, and regrettably—emotionally and physically abusive. It was not that my parents did everything wrong because much of their parenting was right on target. But the times that were damaging and out of control were such that it left me with the overall impression that I was not loved and my family could not be trusted. Facing these facts and specific incidents were enormously painful for me. They still are extremely painful even today.

The abuse for me personally, although there were many times that were out of control, came to a watershed one evening when I was eight years old. I was somewhat depressed fearing that I was unloved in my family because I just failed second grade, was incompetent in my neighborhood, and very much alone. Feeling this pain, I made my decision to “end it all.” I went into the bathroom and selected one of my father’s razor blades and carefully sliced into my forearms. Of course, I knew to avoid cutting my wrists or I would be in serious trouble and might really die! As you can imagine, I was wanting and hoping that I would get a proclamation of love and concern from my family. But upon being discovered by my mother, the reaction was threatening, cold, and uncaring.

Unable to put words to it then, I have come to recognize this awful watershed event as the day I decided for sure that my family did not love me and did not want me. When I tried to manipulate a declaration of love from them by purposely botching suicide, I received the heinous feedback that I was not only not loved, I was not wanted. That evening, I made the decision I would never again risk vulnerability in my family and that my one and only target was to survive the family and leave. True to my word, I was distant and turned my efforts to become okay into performing in school and athletics. But I was

in deep emotional pain as anyone who feels that his or her family is unloving or untrustworthy.

The Root of All Family Pain

There are two twin pillars that hold up all family relationships: love and trustworthiness. Love is essential because the way we are loved in family tells us everything we know about ourselves in terms of our identity. When a child comes into a family, he or she is often greeted by excited parents and extended family as if there is a romantic bond that can never be broken. We look at these children with fascination and almost enchantment as we realize that we hold and are responsible for a whole new human being. I (Terry) remember when my daughter was born. I was fascinated with her hair and especially her perfect little mouth. I held her in a quiet and subdued room only minutes after she was born. Everything about her was unscathed by life or any mistakes that I made. Even more amazing is what she represented: she was half my genetic material and half my wife's. She represented all the goodness and fulfillment of our energy and struggle to be intimate with one another. And, I could have just gobbled her up! When we are loved in this way by our families, we realize that there is no one quite like us and that we are totally unique. No one can ever take our place and no one has our special skill set.

But this romantic love is not the whole story either. As children grow, we realize that they are not just extensions of parents, but are whole new individuals. We love them also as companions as we learn their personalities, adjust to their thoughts and behaviors, and teach them that despite their individuality and quirks, they are part of the family group. We are loyal, committed, and engaged with them wherever their personality takes them. When we are loved with this companionate love, we learn that we belong. And if you have ever had a lifelong, best friend, you realize that you can never quite be alone again because you are always held in a special place of warmth, familiarity, and connection with your friend. In a very real sense, you always belong.

But we love children even more deeply than this romantic and companionate commitment. We also love them altruistically. Parents from all cultures and backgrounds make sacrifices of their own needs for what their children need or even want. A mother goes without food to make sure her babies have plenty of nourishment. A father forgoes adequate shoes or clothing to make sure children have apparel that keeps them warm and dry. It is in this altruistic

love and sacrifice that children learn they are very important and of great worth to the family. When we are loved in this manner, we learn that we are worthy.

If love teaches us all we know about our sense of identity, then we would maintain that being loved romantically, companionately, and altruistically teaches us that we are unique and worthy and that we belong. And we would maintain that if this were all that we thought of ourselves, we would have an essential healthy identity. But while love is very good and identity is essential, we would also maintain it is only one pillar of healthy family relationships.

The second pillar that holds up family relationships is trustworthiness. Trustworthiness teaches the individual that relationships are safe and worthy of engagement for the intimacy, mutual care, and support that they can bring. Relationships are the conduit that brings us the behaviors, actions, and engagements of the family. Essentially, relationships are the way messages and actions are carried from one member of the family to another. But lest you think that relationships are only about carrying love to one another, it is important to remember that the way these relationships take place that is also essential. In order to be safe and trustworthy relationships, they first of all must be predictable. Predictability essentially means that from one time of interaction to the next, we can count on with some degree of reliability that our relational partner will act and behave the same way. Without this element of reliability, I will likely learn to avoid the relationship altogether because it presents an unpredictable risk. How predictable does the relationship have to be to be reliable and safe? Actually, quite reliable. For instance, very few of us would pay someone to build us a house if the builder were only successful in completing the product 50 percent of the time. While we may not demand perfection, in order to be predictable and be judged reliable in a relationship, we would expect consistency around 85 to 90 percent of the time (Hargrave, 2000). Predictability teaches us to feel secure and in turn sets the stage for us to build a sense of safety and trustworthiness.

As important as predictability is, however, it is not enough to ensure safety in relationships. We also expect relationships to be fair or based in justice. Martin Buber (1958) posited the philosophy many years ago that there was an I/Thou framework that existed innately with humans. He believed that in order to know ourselves and become self-aware, we were dependent upon interaction with another. A very simple example of this framework is that I cannot become aware of what my own characteristics mean—whether I am short or tall, intelligent or average, good looking or plain—unless I am

relating to others who will reflect this information back to me. If I am totally alone and isolated, I will be unsuccessful on gaining perspective of my identity and myself. This fact makes relationship a reality or an imperative. It demands that we engage one another and that I contribute to the interaction as well as the other.

But how is this relationship governed? Boszormenyi-Nagy and Krasner (1986) believed that relationships were governed by an innate drive of justice or balance. In other words, we realize that in all relationships there are things we are obligated to do for the good and continuation of the relationship and, as a result of our giving, we are entitled to take certain benefits that enhance our individuality from the relationship. In this way, relational partners learn that they can both benefit from being engaged with one another. For instance, a spouse may contribute his or her work salary, expertise of organization, or labor as just a part of his or her giving. In return, he or she might receive or take from the partner his or her care and nurturing as well as his or her work salary. There are benefits to both partners but there is also balance in what both contributes to the relationship.

When people engage in relationships that have a balanced give and take between relational obligations and entitlements, the innate sense of justice is satisfied. It is this balance or justice between give and take over a period of time that produces a sense of trustworthiness in relationships. At its basic foundation, trustworthiness is the assurance that an individual will receive what he or she deserves in a relationship without having to threaten, manipulate, or retaliate and will have the freedom to contribute and give in a relationship without fear or apprehension of being taken advantage of. It is this trustworthiness that is the key resource in safety that enables family members to give to each other and therefore provides relational security and stability (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986).

As important as predictability and justice or balance are in providing safety to an individual in relationships, there is at least one more element we must mention. This element is openness and essentially it provides the individual with the information and knowledge that there are no secrets or “behind-the-scenes” interactions that negate predictability or justice. If relational partners are open, honest, and transparent with one another, most if not everything remains known to both. In other words, what I see in the interaction is exactly what I get. Think in terms of how devastating relational cheating or infidelity can be in a paired bond. One of the partners thinks that he or she is the only beloved only to find out that it was a sham. Not only does the infidelity destroy a sense of justice and predictability,

it eliminates the possibility of being safe enough to risk vulnerability. On the other hand, when a relationship is open, it assures that relational partners can be vulnerable enough to mutually give.

When a child comes into a family, predictability in structure and behavior in relationships results in the child feeling secure. Getting the nurture and care that he or she is entitled to while making room for him or her to eventually make contributions to the family teaches the individual that there is empowerment that comes from relationships. Finally, openness teaches the child that he or she can be vulnerable and honest. These are the essential qualities in building safety and trustworthiness.

Good things come when there is healthy identity and safety, but of course not all individuals come from families that are loving and trustworthy. All family and relational pain has a common root of violations of love and trustworthiness. We state this importance of love and trustworthiness confidently because we have come to see that humans come into the world looking for the answers to two basic questions: *Am I loved? Am I safe?* Why these two questions? First, we believe there is robust literature concerning attachment. From birth, a child is totally dependent upon the caregiver and the environment in which care is provided. Despite the fact that an infant's cognitive structures are underdeveloped, lower brain functions and emotions drive the child toward a need of bonding and attachment (Broderick & Blewitt, 2006). Attachment Theory (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991) has helped us understand how this emotional link between the caregiver and child sets the stage for the child to understand him or herself, and to develop a style for future relating and desiring or rejecting of elements of human contact through touching, listening, talking, or looking (Pipp & Harmon, 1987). The way a child is loved in a family essentially sets the stage for the child to perceive him or herself as unique, belonging, and worthy (Hargrave & Pfitzer, 2011). In contrast, the person that is unloved or insecurely attached often displays feelings of emotional distress and insecurity (Lieberman, Weston, & Pawl, 1991). The need or drive toward attachment from the child to the caregiver, we believe, is innate as the future development and stability of the child is dependent upon the quality of love and connection shared. In turn, we reason that the love shared between caregiver and child shapes the child's sense of or explanation of his or her identity as he or she comes to believe in the importance, uniqueness, desirability, and worthiness of his or her personhood (Hargrave & Pfitzer, 2011).

Second, we see the importance of trustworthiness and safety over and over in the context of clinical work confirming to us that individuals have this

innate drive toward justice. When there is a consistent or severe imbalance between this relational give and take, individuals feel either cheated or over-benefitted from relationships. Instead of the balance that builds trustworthiness in a relationship, trust is drained and the members of the relationship feel that their just entitlement is threatened. Instead of providing individuals the freedom to give and security to receive, the relationship becomes an unstable arena with a “dog eat dog” mentality where individuals only strive to secure their own entitlement. It is the innate sense of justice that sets individuals in the relationship on this self-justifying claim toward securing compensation for their just entitlement. Boszormenyi-Nagy and Krasner (1986) refer to this violent pursuit of one’s entitlement as *destructive entitlement*. Destructive entitlement can manifest itself in many ways, including paranoid attitudes, hostility, rage, emotional cutoffs, and destructive harm to other individuals. Imbalances in the relational give and take and resulting destructive entitlement may be the result of gradual decline in trust or a single violent and destructive act. Again and again, we see clinically how this destructive entitlement drives people to take harmful actions in relationships that simply do not make sense: a father rejecting a child because the child fails at an activity or class; a spouse committing an infidelity with someone when he or she deeply loves his or her spouse and family; a person taking physical aggression out on a family member when he or she was abused as a child. These situations seemingly defy logic, but do make sense when put into the intergenerational context of destructive entitlement (Hargrave & Pfitzer, 2011). Violent and destructive acts deteriorate relationships rapidly because they insult the balance of give and take in a severe fashion. Most often, these severe acts are intertwined with behaviors that are associated with gradual declines in trustworthiness.

It is into this context of love and trustworthiness that people are damaged in a similar way. All violations, at the very root, are tied to violations of identity or safety. This is not to say that some violations that come from families are not more intense or more traumatic. Of course an instance of long-standing sexual abuse from a family member carries with it more intensity and is potentially more traumatic than emotional passivity from a parent or emotional manipulation that results in parentification. But the fact remains: the emotional passivity or manipulation can be just as injurious to a person’s sense of identity or safety in relationships as the sexual abuse. You see, the intensity of abuse or neglect is not the key factor in individual pain. The key factor is the violation of identity and safety. When therapeutically dealing with the work of forgiveness, it is essential that the therapist learn this distinction between intensity (or severity) and violation.

In Terry's story of his family, there was physical and emotional abuse of some severity. But the essence of the pain was rooted in the violation of his identity and safety. He felt, at the core of his identity, that he was unloved and unwanted. He felt powerless and incompetent to ever be able to be safe in relationships. If the therapist understands the nature of pain, then it will greatly assist the client in understanding the violations of love and trustworthiness that exist in the family and result in clarity with the essence of what is or what is not forgivable.

It is important to put this focus on pain in the context of forgiveness. When it comes to relational violations in the family, most people will answer the questions of *Am I loved?* and *Am I safe?* with a qualified "yes." It is qualified because no person grows up in a family where things were always loving and perfectly safe. But usually these violations of identity and safety are minor in nature like little cuts or bruises to our physical bodies. Most of these injuries will heal with time and under the influence of clear demonstrations of love and trustworthiness from family. But others of us and some of our clients will answer the above questions with a resounding "no." In these situations, we find stories of how parents totally neglected children and they were left to fend for themselves in finding food, shelter, and safety. We find stories of how parents demanded children take responsibility to provide economically or emotionally for parental deficit. We find heinous legacies of family members taking out anger or emotional upset in the form of physical abuse as well as evil traditions of sexual abuse, desertion, and intentional endangerment. These unqualified answers leave no doubt that the injuries to identities and senses of safety were not small, but rather severe and seemingly irreparable—like the amputation of limbs or the removal of organs.

Looking for Halley and the Tug of Forgiveness in Terry's Family

I fancy myself somewhat of a backyard astronomer. I am one of the strange birds that loves to search the stars for faint smudges of light in a telescope eyepiece when most of the sane world is asleep. The thing that really hooked my interest in astronomy, however, was when I learned as a boy of the 1985–86 apparition of Halley's comet. When the first sighting of Halley was made in deep space in the early 1980s by a huge telescope, my plans were already taking shape to make the most of my once in a lifetime opportunity

to view the comet. Because of the distance between Halley and the earth and the alignment that would make the comet most prominent in the extreme southern sky, this was perhaps the poorest visual apparition in two centuries. It did not matter. This was my opportunity and I was going to make the most of it. I constantly read about viewing techniques, photography methods, and the comet's history and characteristics. As I read, I longed for stories about Halley during the 1910 apparition. Halley put on a spectacular display in 1910 and I found myself wondering what my grandparents and great grandparents lives were like back then as they watched the "show." This is what caused me to stumble on the idea of putting a time capsule together so people like me in the year 2061—the next apparition—would know how life for my family was in 1986.

At the time, I was stalwart on the idea that I would not have children. It was my destructive entitlement way of putting an end to the abuse in my intergenerational family. If family could not be trusted, then I would not expand the family and deny myself and my parents of further offspring. But I felt that someone in the Hargrave family would be around at that time and would be interested. As I began to think about the contents of the time capsule, my anxiety steadily increased. Time capsules are like a slice of life that tells the future not only what life was like when the capsule was put together, but also about the people who put their hearts and souls into the effort. My heart and soul were split. There was part of me that was actually okay. I had a wonderful wife who cared for me and some clear direction on where I was heading in life. But the other part was still waning from the burden of incompetence and loneliness. My destructive anger and self-justifying pain would seep out every now and then from behind the strong wall that I had fortified to hold it back. There were clearly times that I was surprised at how angry I got and how close I could come to being downright abusive myself. So which part was I going to tell the future about? Only the good parts about myself or the bad parts on how I struggled with my family? I truly did want to be honest with myself, but honesty in this setting would mean that I would have to involve my parents and my intergenerational past. Questions flooded my mind. Can they be trusted? Would they love me enough to even participate? Are they able to talk to me about the past without using it against me?

In the midst of this struggle, my grandfather on my mother's side was diagnosed with inoperable stomach cancer. The doctors gave him the option of staying in the hospital or going home to die. True to the tough old cowboy he was, he chose to go back to his home in the small town of Roy,

New Mexico, where he had been a rancher for most of his life. My wife and I traveled with my mother to visit him for what I knew would be the last time. At the end of our weekend visit, I was at a loss for words. There was this feeling of family desperation with him also. It was not that he was directly physically or emotionally abusive to me, but I could tell that I was not held in high regard with him. Even then, I suspected that my mother had learned the pattern of abuse with her mother and father. The lack of trust with him was just as profound as in my family, and it was kept just as quiet.

The time came to say goodbye for the last time. Although I cannot remember exactly what I said, I stepped up to his bedside saying something inappropriate and inadequate like, "Take care of yourself." After I stepped back, my mother took his hand and said, "Daddy, I will see you next week." No tears were shed between us and we would have probably parted much in the same way that we always lived had it not been for my wife.

Sharon, who knows the severe pain of not being able to say goodbye to loved ones, stepped up to my grandfather's side with tears in her eyes. She took his chubby face into both of her hands and tenderly stared into his eyes and said, "I love you, and I will miss you." These simple words blew the lid off my family's cover. She unknowingly had exposed us for what and who we were. The void of intimacy, love, and trust was exposed. It was only a few minutes after I left my grandfather's house that I realized that my wife's words were the ones that I wanted to say to him: "I love you and I will miss you." I did not have the courage or the words. The opportunity to address the issue with my grandfather during the living years was lost forever. I walked away, and my mother walked away, in pain that was outside the track of grief.

I suppose that with the passage of time, my mother and I could have simulated not having the issue of love and trust exposed and we could have gone back to living life as it had always been. But I knew that there would be a day when it was my mother or father's turn to be on that deathbed. I resolved that when it came that time, I would have this issue of love and trust settled and that I could indeed say to them, "I love you and I will miss you." So the decision for the time capsule was inescapable. I was going to tell the descendants of the family about the real family. There would be no pretense of intimacy. I would tell the story of the real people and the real family so they could decide who we were for themselves. If it were to be a capsule to the future intergenerational family, then the intergenerational family story would have to be told. For the real story to be told, however, I had to open myself up to the possibility of having a real relationship with my family once again and

dealing with the issue of forgiveness. I would have to be open to not only reviewing the pain of the past, but also living with the possibility of having more pain inflicted on the future.

Chasing the Pain and Clarifying Victimization

Why was it so painful? Relationships, and especially family relationships, are unique in their ability to not only tell us about ourselves, but also predict how we will act in future relationships. When we have violations of love and trustworthiness, we carry core identity and safety issues of feeling unloved and unsafe. We would see these two emotions as *primary emotions* (Hargrave & Pfitzer, 2011) because we see identity and safety as the core emotional process in humans. Although children many times cannot verbalize these primary emotions, we would maintain that these are innate needs that are likely lower brain functions. As a child grows, simple feelings of lack of love are verbalized in a variety of terms including: unloved, unworthy, insignificant, alone, worthless, devalued, defective, inadequate, rejected, unacceptable, hopeless, unwanted, abandoned, unappreciated, discouraged, and disrespected (Hargrave & Pfitzer, 2011). In the same way, primary emotions regarding lack of safety are often verbalized as: unsafe, insecure, unsure, used, guilty, fearful, powerless, out of control, controlled, vulnerable, disconnected, unknown, betrayed, invalidated, and unable to measure up to expectations. Although the words are pre-frontal cortex expressions and descriptions, we believe they are accurately describing lack of identity and safety (Hargrave & Pfitzer, 2011). Research is quite clear that assaults to identity and safety activate the limbic system in the brain and particularly the amygdala (LeDoux, 1996). The amygdala is closely associated prone to emotional reactions of fear and anger, which in turn lead to reactions of *fight and flight* (LeDoux, 1996). We believe that when an individual fails to receive the love and trustworthiness he or she is entitled to, it results in stress and in turn produces emotional reactions in the individual that demand response through fight or flight (Hargrave & Pfitzer, 2011).

When individuals have their entitlement addressed in loving and trustworthy ways, they feel a deep sense of calm or peace in the primary emotions—they know who they are and know that they are safe. But when there is violation, the primary emotions promote distress in the brain triggering a demand for action. Hargrave and Pfitzer (2011) call this demand for action related to fight and flight *self-reactivity*. In other words, when an individual is

distressed, he or she moves to self-reactivity in order to cope with the threat to identity or safety. The problem is that these moves toward coping are almost always coming out of destructive entitlement and are, themselves, violations of love and trustworthiness in other relationships. One thing that we learn very quickly in the work of forgiveness is that there hardly ever is a person who is clearly a victim or clearly a victimizer. In my (Terry) situation and story, I was victimized by the abuse and lack of love through emotional connection from my parents. But it did not stop there: As I coped with my lack of identity and safety, I was angry and aggressive at times, withdrawing and passive at others and distinctly secretive. I had this self-reactivity in my relationships with my co-workers, friends, spouse, and children. I was, in a very active and real way, violating love and trustworthiness in those relationships. In short, I was a victimizer. Self-reactivity and destructive entitlement makes it clear that victims are almost always also victimizers and therefore, victimizers are almost always victims.

When we come to the work of forgiveness, it is essential that the therapist understand that individuals are victimized by violations of identity and safety in their primary emotions. But it is equally important to realize that victimized individuals also carry self-reactivity that potentially spills over into future generations and other relationships where the individual now becomes responsible for the same types of love and trustworthiness violations. This understanding of pain not only helps a therapist understand the complexity of the intergenerational nature of pain referred to as a *revolving slate* (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986), but also assists in sorting out responsibility and the way out of family violations. Figure 1.1 clarifies this framework. From the figure, we see that as individuals experience the violations of love and/or trustworthiness, they feel the pain or distress of lack of identity and/or lack of safety in the primary emotions. In response, the individual reacts or copes in extreme fight or flight responses. Most often in violation of identity, the individual may go to one extreme of blame/rage where he or she expresses aggressive and angry behavior or by integrating a deep sense of shame about his or her identity. Very often when there is a violation of safety, the individual may express *fight* reactivity and take control of every situation to the point of being non-dependent upon others. At the other extreme, the individual may express *flight* reactivity and conclude that safety is impossible and escape the pain of relationships through irresponsible or anesthetizing behaviors. No matter what the coping or *self-reactivity* is, it is easy to follow how a violated individual now becomes a violator of love and trustworthiness (Hargrave & Pfitzer, 2011).

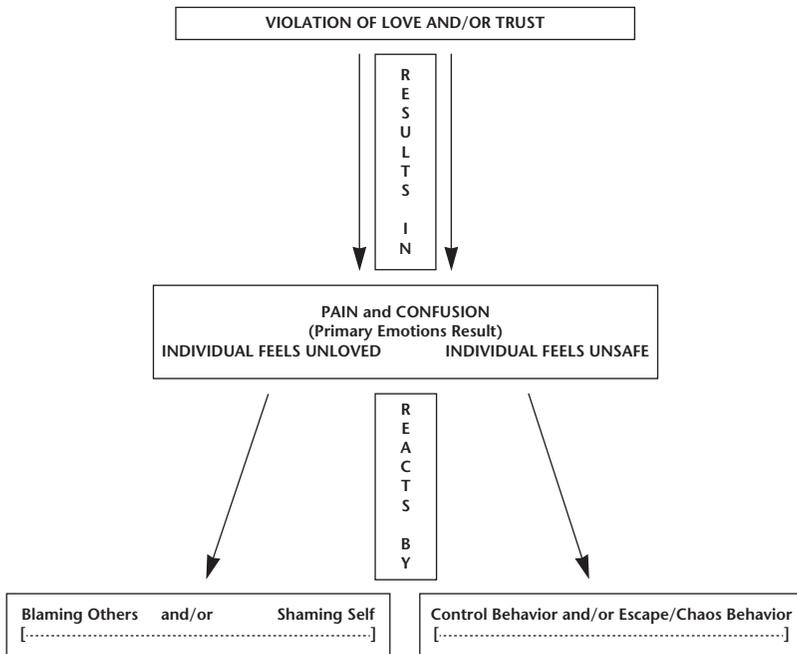


Figure 1.1 Lack of Love and Trustworthiness Produces Self-Reactivity

Terry’s Family of Origin Apparition

If victims turn into victimizers throughout the generational turn of the revolving slate of lack of love and justice, one might ask what is the use of forgiveness. Forgiveness is the opportunity not only to address the damage of the past in a constructive way, but it also offers the opportunity for families and individuals to make situations better for the future. Each individual is a touchstone and with one hand they reach back into the past with the opportunity to resolve, clarify, and remake relationships. With the other hand, they reach out into the future of relationships with the opportunity to behave in loving and trustworthy ways not tied to destructive entitlement. Forgiveness is a key intervention that can make all the difference in the world for a family and an individual.

In my own family, it was true that I burned with pain over abusive acts, lost memories, un-involvement, and lack of love. But as I confronted the reality of the pain, it also met memories of parental sacrifice and care that served

as firewalls to the bitterness and my own destructive behavior. As the comet Halley made its way toward my once in a lifetime apparition, I had made a decision about including my past—and my parents—in what I would pass along to the next generation.

I came to the point where I was able to issue a half-hearted invitation to my parents to join me in my trip to view the comet and take part in putting together the time capsule for their descendants. To my surprise, they enthusiastically accepted. This encouraged me to invite my parents in for a second look at the past in a constructive manner. Again to my surprise, they were not only willing to talk about the past, but were willing to acknowledge responsibility. In our conversation, they confirmed the abuse in my family, but then went on to tell me the story of their own pain. My father told me about the pain he felt when he and my mother separated when we were children. He told me the stories of his depression after being stationed in Greenland with the Air Force. While he was there, a litany of horrible events occurred: men froze to death trying to get back to the barracks after using the toilet; he spent ten straight days in a sleeping bag buried in the snow in sixty degree below zero weather while his group waited for a break in a blizzard; and he dealt with agonizing separation from my mother with only two items of mail allowed during a year long stay. He spoke of his pain growing up in a large family where there was lack of love and profound lack of security.

My mother told me about the regrettable acts of abuse in her own family. She told me about her struggles as she tried to grow up while dealing with her own legacy of shame and guilt. She told me about her mother and her mother's mother and how she believed she learned this lack of care and nurture from them. She said, "I just never realized how important it was to hold and love children. I didn't know you were supposed to rock and cuddle babies. It simply did not occur to me that security given by touch was important." I parked my mother's words in my mind and for the first time in my life I began to understand why she had always defended her parenting skills saying that she was a good parent. Considering their backgrounds and compared with their parents, my parents had indeed done better. As I talked with them, they became less antagonistic and more vulnerable. In response, I became less defensive and it became easier—even enjoyable—to recount the efforts of love and nurture that they had made during my childhood. Issues of the past were certainly not erased, but the impact of love and trust in our relationship had shifted significantly. The more I understood, the more I trusted them and gave them opportunity. The relationship was changing. After one of these discussions with my parents, I drove outside the city limits and with my telescope

I caught my first glimpse of Halley. This time, the sighting was with my own eyes and not some second-hand report. I had the proof that the great comet was returning just as the reconnection with my family group was real.

A few months later, my wife and I, along with our parents, traveled to the Davis Mountains to view Halley during the peak observation window. During the two nights of observation, I had planned several ritualistic activities. We opened a bottle of wine and toasted our unborn descendants as we recorded what was said. We read a passage from the Bible declaring the handiwork of God while watching the comet. We made predictions of the future, composed lyrics about the comet, and took pictures of ourselves. The more rituals we performed, the more I realized that I was discovering a sense of secure self and safety in family. Love and trust were becoming unified across my lifespan.

The time capsule gave my parents the essential opportunity to express love and trustworthiness to descendants yet unborn. When they expressed the love with their newfound resources, they used me as the medium. The past was not obliterated, but the capsule began to represent a promise of childhood, a contract between my parents and myself that no matter what happened in the past or what would happen in the future, we loved one another and we could be trusted. At 4:00 am, out in the desert mountains, I joined with my parents in the work of forgiveness. The great comet Halley was extremely low in the south-southeast, dimmed by the haze of the horizon and the tremendous distance between it and the earth. It was, by all accounts, the poorest apparition in almost two thousand years. But it was there. Its gentle tail stretched upward across the constellation Scorpio silhouetted against the background of the Milky Way. My family's beginning of love and trust was not a burst of light, which made automatic reconciliation, but the clear bond between us secured the intergenerational transition. No matter how unimpressive our first moves toward one another, a new relationship had begun between my parents and me.

Within months, much of my pain and anger began to erode. It was not that I did not have the knowledge of the family past, but it was as if the pain did not hurt as much or the same way anymore. For the first time in my life, I began to want children. I desired to pass myself and my parents along to *my* offspring. Since the apparition of Halley, there has been a steady growth of love and trust between me and my parents. Not all has been rosy, but there is a security and a continual effort to build the future of the family away from the past injustices and pain. In 1991, my mother and father went on a mission trip to Brazil with their Presbyterian Church group. After two weeks, part of the mission group returned and some others, including my parents, stayed to do some touring. One of the returning members of the mission team reported

that my mother was such a loving and caring woman. I must admit, even with the tremendous work that my mother had done through the years at becoming nurturing, my first response was to think, “My mother? No one in my life has ever referred to my mother as a loving and caring woman.” But then came the story.

My mother had taken on as her mission the very young children who were quarantined in the hospital with tuberculosis. For six months, these children would be separated from the care and nurturing of their families. My mother, as reported by the mission team, would sit for six hours a day rocking, holding, and singing to those needy children. My mother knows how important it is to impart love, security, and trust to children. She always did, it was just that now she was able to access the resources she had to give away. And as she rocked those children in Brazil, she was saying to me in a very real way, “If I could do it over again, I would do this for you.” And when my mother now holds, rocks, and sings to my children—and holds me as she does—she empowers me and my whole intergenerational family with love and trust.

There is a wooden box containing a time capsule that sits in my living room in my home. The following words are inscribed on a brass plaque:

To the south-southeast, ours in Winter wanes
 Capricornus, Sagittarius, Scorpio and on.
 But to the north-northwest, yours in Summer soars
 The reed of time, to recount and recall.
 Hail Halley! Our generation mark!

The issue of love and trust is settled for me because of the powerful healing work of forgiveness and it has changed the destructive pathway of my family. Several years ago when my sister was dying of cancer, I, along with my family of origin gathered to see her for what I knew would be the last time. At the end of the day when it was my turn to say goodbye, I looked my sister in the eyes and said, “I love you. I will miss you and I will never forget you.” My sister, with almost a surprised look in her eye responded back, “We really are a family now, aren’t we.” I know the power of forgiveness to address the very roots of family pain in the past and make life reconciled and healthier in the future. My parents, now in their eighties, still affirm and confirm love and trustworthiness to me in our interactions. Like life, our relationships are not perfect. But the issue of love and trustworthiness is settled in my family. My belief is also that in 2061, when my descendants open the time capsule under the blaze of the comet Halley, the apparition of love and trust will be even stronger and they will be able to pass the peace of identity and safety to one another.

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