

# Excerpts from three chapters from Facing the Truth of Your Life

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### Redefining Forgiveness

*Saying “I forgive you” is about taking care of the other, instead of yourself.*

AS A YOUNG BOY, I watched an episode of *Gunsmoke* — a 1960’s TV western. In the episode, a man shoots a priest and, as the priest lies dying, he lifts up his blood-covered fingers and anoints the forehead of his killer and offers absolution. The killer is startled and unsure what to make of the priest’s forgiveness. The killer had never before experienced compassion, and this tenderness shakes him to his core. The killer feels so guilt-ridden that he kills himself. He could not find a way to live with the pain of having killed someone who was kind to him.

*Gunsmoke’s* writers made a compelling case for religious forgiveness. Inspiringly, the priest lives out his beliefs to his last seconds of life. This one-hour of melodrama has stayed in my memory for over 50 years. Young children can more easily learn other languages because their minds so readily absorb information. Consequently, we are deeply receptive to and influenced by messages received in our youth. Back then I thought the priest’s forgiveness was admirable. But now as an adult, a psychotherapist, former Christian and now Buddhist, I have a different perspective of that TV episode.

Forgiveness is a subject about which most people have an opinion. Due to the childhood religious upbringing or immediate family’s particular beliefs, forgiving or not forgiving is usually a settled question in most people’s minds. Forgiveness is a religious concept. In the West, forgiveness is deeply ingrained in the culture and consciousness whether we are religious or not.

The kinds of transgressive acts referred to in this chapter are violations in which you were an innocent victim. You did not voluntarily play a role in what happened. Your child is killed by someone or paralyzed in a car accident that was not your fault. These are examples of those kinds of victimizations.

**Small and Medium Hurts** require a different path to healing. Those hurts were when you had a role in what had happened. The other person may have the bulk of responsibility, but you participated by making a choice to be there in some way. Those situations will be discussed in the Small Hurts chapter.

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## To Love or Not to Love Myself

*Because true belonging only happens when we present our authentic, imperfect selves to the world, our sense of belonging can never be greater than our level of self-acceptance.*

— Brené Brown (b. 1965) *Daring Greatly*

### Self-Love

Self-love, at its best, is empathy for yourself. It comforts you when there is no one else to give support. It can also be an awakening to one's true self-worth and an opening to being loved. Self-love is a first steppingstone to a deeper relationship with the public self. Because of our popular conception of self-love, it is important to understand its role and limitations in development and growth.

Self-comforting is a worthy goal and necessary for all of us, but self-love is not the destination itself. It is a building block that creates a stronger self, so that a deeper meta-awareness of being can be the basis for being alive. In accepting ourselves without judgment, we must also understand that we are constant work in progress. No one is without flaws. Through the process of

accepting yourself, you have the opportunity to change how you choose to be in the world, in a fundamental way.

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## Keys to Raising

*The most important thing that parents can teach their children is how to get along without them.*

— Frank A. Clark (b. 1860) Politician

OVER THE PAST 34 years in therapeutic settings, I have learned a lot about what works and doesn't work when it comes to parenting. There are some universal truths about successfully navigating the

landmines and potholes of childhood so a child can grow into adulthood successfully. What follows are tips from the men and women who have trusted me with both their pain and their joy.

## Key6

**Do not overemphasize looks  
or constantly tell children they are special.**

It is important to validate that children are attractive, but do not tell them repeatedly how beautiful they are. Validate their self-worth, their accomplishments, their efforts and being a good person.

It is striking how often we hear parents tell children how beautiful they are, or that they are “lookers” or that people are going to adore you because they are pretty. While it might be true that the child is attractive, and most parents believe their child is attractive, it is not helpful for a child to learn to value their worth based upon their looks. Because looks change and fade with time, what may be a very attractive child could still turn into a very unattractive adult. If self-esteem is based on how other people respond to looks, then adult children will be dependent upon others to make them feel better about themselves.