

## Forgive Your Siblings (Part 4 of 6)

**W**hile some of the pain of growing up may be related to our experiences with our parents, it is often rifts among brothers and sisters that split a family for years. The brother who always got into trouble as a child may forever be considered the “black sheep” by the rest, and may spend the rest of his life trying to prove himself to others. Or else, he may give up and accept the role imposed on him. The girl who was teased by her brothers for being overweight may develop a complex whereby she never feels attractive, no matter how good she looks later on. Experiences growing up with our brothers and sisters help form the way we relate to others.

Children can be very cruel. One doesn't need to look far to see that Original Sin is a reality. The most innocent of little children can wreak psychological damage that lasts long after they forget they had ever done anything. Remember that it was likely not sparked by you, but that you may simply have been an easy target.

\* \* \* \* \*

Forgive your siblings for **the way they treated you when you (and they) were young**. If they were constantly “getting in your face,” realize that they were going through tough times just as you were. If they were too distant, consider that they may have taken on a parental role to make up for what your parents didn't supply.

Forgive them for **not giving you the space you needed** to explore life on your own, to live your own life. Forgive them for **prying**, or for **making fun** of you. If you were to ask them, they would likely not even remember having caused the pain you still live with. Forgive them for **blaming you** for things you did not do. Forgive them for **getting preferential treatment** from your parents.

The home is considered by many to be a haven from society's rules. Forgive your sisters and brothers if they took liberties with you that they never could in “polite company.” Forgive them for **testing your feelings**. Sometimes we practice at home before risking “out there.”

Forgive them for **making demands** on your time, for demanding your presence at every party and family birthday celebration. Family living can be a strain, and it can be stressful trying to always do family things when you want to be on your own a little more. Many people feel pulled in a thousand different directions. The family is the only source of stability they have. Maintaining that stability and cultivating it may have been as important for them as perhaps it was unimportant for you.

On the other hand, forgive them if they **need their own space** right now. They may have bad memories of growing up and need some distance for that to heal. Sometimes people develop identities that do not square with family expectations and need to be away in order to live their own lives.

Forgive them for **treating you now at age 30 in the same way they did when you were 12**. The teasing, the competition, the condescension, the patronizing attitude— these often remain. All can leave nasty scars.

\* \* \* \* \*

We can usually get over rifts that occur in life between ourselves and co-workers or friends. Yet family rifts can hound us to our dying day. To place them under the doormat in our minds and simply ignore them rarely does the trick. They have a way of eating at us until we make peace, or at least try to make peace. Few things are more tragic than estrangement from parents or siblings. We can try to make peace with those with whom we grew up. We can strive to understand them and accept them, flaws and all. We can try to forgive.