

A Description of Each IFI Forgiveness Curriculum Guide Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 10 (ages 15-16)

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Overview of the Basic Structure of Each Curriculum Guide

Whether you are teaching 6-year-old children or 12-year-old adolescents, the structure of the curriculum guides are similar. The basic structure of the guides is described in this section.

Charting a Course

You will find that each lesson begins with a section entitled, “Charting a Course.” This section provides you with an overview of the main ideas of the lesson, a deeper understanding of the concepts to be taught, and insight as to how these ideas may benefit the students.

General and Behavioral Objectives

This section lists the main objectives of the lesson including what the students will learn and what they will do. We ask that, although you are free to alter the stories, questions, and activities to more effectively meet the needs of your students, you meet the general objectives of each lesson.

The Procedures

This summarizes the steps the teacher will take to effectively teach the lesson.

The Story and Discussion Section

This section includes a list of story recommendations and discussion questions. The discussion questions will help the students understand and learn the main ideas of the lesson. Please conduct the class discussion following the story (picture book, chapter book, or DVD/VHS).

We encourage you to look for opportunities to discuss the themes being taught in each lesson (living from one’s best self, inherent worth, moral love, goodness, forgiveness, courage, justice, common sense, and balance) outside the formal lesson. Please feel free to add to or subtract from the list of questions if it will help you to more effectively teach your students the main ideas of each lesson.

We have written the discussion questions to give you maximum flexibility in teaching the lessons. This means that you may effectively teach the lessons with a wide variety of stories. You are not bound to teach the lesson with a story that we have recommended.

The following points are our rationale for this:

1. We serve many different kinds of school systems. This new approach, in which teachers can use books already in their classrooms, will help school systems save much-needed money compared to a curriculum in which new books must be ordered. One of our tasks is to take forgiveness education to those regions of the world that are lacking in resources so that students will have a chance, through forgiveness, to cast off resentment and revenge-seeking, forging a better life than might have been the case if anger were to become a life-long companion.

2. This new approach will increase flexibility for teachers. Teachers from any school or community will be able to teach the forgiveness curriculum in ways that are consistent with current philosophies and approaches as reflected in the books that they already have.
3. Teachers will be able to more easily incorporate the forgiveness lessons into existing curricula. This will solve the problem of trying to find time to teach forgiveness in a school day already filled with many curricular requirements.
4. Students from around the world, with different languages and cultural norms, will be served through forgiveness education because books written in their language and appropriate to their culture can be selected to teach the lessons.
5. Students will have the opportunity to learn about forgiveness through stories that are their favorites (the students may recommend favorites or bring them from home). This may make it more likely that the students will continue to read and think about forgiveness.

Amount of Time per Week

Each lesson will take a half-hour to an hour (excluding the reading that should be done, either aloud by you or silently by each child). We recommend teaching the lessons once a week for twelve weeks and then following up by creating a forgiving community in the classroom (see Lesson 12 for some ideas on this).

Cautions throughout the Lessons

We consistently alert the teacher to potential dangers of forgiveness without proper understanding. Sometimes forgiveness can be misunderstood and we take great effort to avoid the misunderstandings. For instance, a child might forgive a fellow student who is behaving in a bullying way, and when there is misunderstanding, the student who was bullied might think that the other student is now somehow trustworthy because the bullied student forgave.

As we know, when one person forgives, this does not mean that the other who acted unjustly is now somehow transformed for the better. We teach children, then, that when they forgive someone who bullies, for example, they should not interact with that student *if he or she is showing dangerous behavior*. In other words, a child can forgive and then not reconcile. A child should not be pushed into applying forgiveness toward any offender if this makes the child uncomfortable.

As another point of possible misunderstanding, a child who forgives can and should strive for fairness. The mistake is to think in an “either-or” way---either I can forgive or I can seek justice, but I cannot do both. Surely, adults can and so can the children apply both forgiveness and justice toward another person.

As a final example, even when a child tries to love, anger can remain. It does not mean that a child is unforgiving if he or she still feels anger toward someone who was deeply unfair to him or her. We encourage teachers not to try for perfection here, but to enter the challenge that forgiveness can include love. Throughout the lessons, we remind the teacher of the potential complications or misunderstandings about forgiveness so that he or she can teach with accuracy and confidence.

A Description of the Curriculum Guides

Pre-Kindergarten (ages 4-5) and Kindergarten (ages 5-6) Forgiveness Curricula

The forgiveness curriculum guides (I Can Love! and The Heart of Love as the Building Blocks of Forgiveness) should be seen as pre-forgiveness curricula. I say this because the focus is not on forgiveness as much as it is on agape love, or the kind of love that serves others. Without a developmental grounding in what love is, without some experience of being loved and loving others, it may be more difficult for children to deeply understand forgiveness in the later grades.

These guides have fewer lessons (eight) compared with the number of lesson in the later guides (12 to 16). We present stories through picture books in which a mother or a father, for example, tenderly and unconditionally love a child. The Runaway Bunny by Margaret Wise Brown, as one example in the Kindergarten curriculum, depicts an insecure toddler-bunny who keeps asking his mother if she would love him if he were different. In every case she patiently and lovingly shows him how she would be with him no matter what. The children then discuss the beauty and importance of being loved unconditionally.

First Grade (ages 6-7) and Second Grade (ages 7-8) Forgiveness Curricula

The main point of curricula for 6-8-year-old children (The Adventure of Forgiveness and Discovering Forgiveness) is to introduce the children to the “basics of forgiveness.” We do this primarily through Dr. Seuss books (such as Horton Hears a Who) for first grade and Disney stories and DVDs (such as The Fox and the Hound) for second grade. When we use that term--- *the basics of forgiveness*---we are talking about the central foundation that will allow the children to build forgiveness skills as they develop through their lives. The basics of forgiveness include five issues: inherent worth, moral love, kindness, respect, and generosity. All of these are described below.

Inherent worth. This is the important idea that a person is a person no matter what he or she does. It is akin to the idea that we are to love the sinner, but hate the sin. As children begin to see beyond what people do to what they are like inside themselves, they will be laying an important foundation for forgiving.

Moral Love. When we morally love someone, we love him or her unconditionally, despite his or her flaws. Certainly, someone who morally loves another can ask fairness of him or her. Yet, the one who morally loves has the other person’s best interest at heart. Moral love is not a selfish or self-centered love. It has that lavish notion of love that Joseph showed to his brothers. Moral love underlies true forgiveness.

Kindness. When people are kind, they tend to be warm-hearted, concerned about the other person, humane. People who practice being kind are laying the foundation for forgiving. Some people talk about the “change of heart” that occurs when someone forgives. The heart-of-stone becomes the softened heart.

Respect. When someone shows respect, he or she is highly regarding the other person. Some people think that respect must be earned. We believe, following the philosopher Immanuel Kant, that people possess intrinsic value to such a degree that we should respect all persons. We respect, not because of what people *do*, but because of whom they *are*. As children practice respecting all people, they make forgiveness easier in the future.

Generosity. To be generous is to give abundantly. It is a gift-giving that surprises and delights the recipient. If children can learn to be generous, they will be in a better position to understand what it means to give a gift of forgiveness to someone who hurts them.

Our intention in the first half of both of these earlier curricula was *not* to have the children understand or to practice forgiveness, but to understand the above five aspects of forgiveness. In both cases, we used children's stories to illustrate the concepts. We used different stories in Discovering Forgiveness (a slightly more advance curriculum) than in The Adventure of Forgiveness to bring about this learning. We used more complex ideas in Discovering Forgiveness than in The Adventure of Forgiveness to challenge the students at their appropriate developmental level.

The second part of both of these earlier curricula was intended to once again introduce the above five "basics of forgiveness" *in the specific context of forgiveness*. We did not ask children at this point to forgive anyone. Instead, we asking them to *understand* how inherent worth looks in the context of forgiveness as described in stories. We asked the children to understand kindness and moral love, respect and generosity all within the context of forgiveness. We again did this through stories that illustrate these points.

Finally, in the third part of the curricula, we asked the children to think about someone who has hurt them unfairly. We then had them try to forgive that person by exercising the idea of inherent worth, and the virtues of moral love, kindness, respect, and generosity toward that person. This third part is the practical part of the curriculum. The first two parts set the stage for actual forgiving.

Forgiveness encompasses more than the practice of inherent worth and the exercise of the virtues of moral love, kindness, respect, and generosity. This is a curriculum based on the principles of developmental psychology. We want to start small, start with some of the basics, and keep it somewhat simple. We save the subtlety for later grades.

Our intent was to make the exploration of forgiveness interesting and fun. One does not learn to play football by being thrust into highly competitive, serious situations too early. At first, it is sufficient for the children to run out onto the field on a warm afternoon, kick the ball around, and not worry yet about all the rules and regulations. It is the same with forgiveness. Its introduction should be somewhat light, free of lots of rules, and fun.

Third Grade (ages 8-9) Forgiveness Curriculum

The Joy of Forgiveness curriculum might be described as our most tender-hearted effort on behalf of the children. We say this because of its emphasis on moral love in forgiveness. We have taken the one virtue from the earlier curricula----*that of moral love*----and have emphasized throughout the lessons that as people forgive, they are actually lavishing love onto the offending person. We chose moral love among the five basic concepts from the earlier curricula because it is the central moral principle in forgiving and therefore perhaps the most important. It is also the most difficult and challenging.

This idea, that to forgive is to love, is common in the world of academic scholarship where forgiveness is examined in depth. For example, the brilliant writer C.S. Lewis, who was born and raised in Belfast, wrote that if we are to forgive, then we are to exercise the virtue of love. It surely is not simple to offer love to someone who was unfair. Mr. Lewis knows this. He quips that we all think forgiveness is a lovely idea.....until we ourselves have something to forgive. Then the idea of forgiving is met with howls of protest. Yet, it is in this struggle to love the offending person that true growth as a person may be realized for the forgiver.

As in the earlier curricula (The Adventure of Forgiveness and Discovering Forgiveness), we primarily teach the concepts of forgiveness and moral love (that we call *lavish love* in the curriculum) through stories. One of the centerpiece books is *Rising Above the Storm Clouds*, which I had the privilege of writing. We chose the kind of stories that should appeal to children ages 8 or 9 through 11.

As in the earlier curricula, we basically have three parts to the curriculum (that we do not label as Parts 1-3 as in the earlier curricula): First, we introduce the children to the concept of lavish love. Second, we introduce them to the idea of lavish love *in the context of forgiving*. Third, we give the children the opportunity to *apply their learning to forgiving someone who has hurt them*. Again, the emphasis is on lavish love as they explore forgiveness.

Fourth Grade (ages 9-10) Forgiveness Curriculum

As in the earlier curricula, we primarily teach the concepts of forgiveness and moral love (that we call *lavish love* in the curriculum) through stories. The centerpiece story is *The Tale of Despereaux* by Kate DiCamillo. We basically have two parts to the curriculum: First, we introduce the children to the concept of forgiveness and the related concepts of lavish love, inherent worth, empathy, and compassion. Second, we introduce them to these ideas *in the context of forgiving*. We end the 12-lesson curriculum by asking the students to think about how forgiveness fits into the larger communities of school, home, and other social settings.

Fifth Grade (ages 10-11) Forgiveness Curriculum

The fifth grade curriculum continues teaching the children about inherent worth, moral love, kindness, respect, and generosity within the context of forgiveness through story, discussion, and activities. As in the earlier grades, the children will learn *how* to forgive those who have been unfair. This forgiveness curriculum introduces a more developmentally advanced, but age appropriate, concept of seeking and receiving forgiveness. The centerpiece of the curriculum is the DVD, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. The curriculum consists of 15 lessons that can be taught in approximately 45 minutes with additional activities to extend the lesson if you so choose.

Sixth and Seventh Grade (ages 11-13) Forgiveness Curricula

In adolescence, students begin to more deeply forge their sense of identity. Who am I? What is important to me? What are my central goals in life? The two curricula here (both entitled, *Be Your Best Self*, parts 1 and 2) have the focus of helping the students, if they so choose, to make forgiving a part of their identity as a person. The lessons assist the students to live the best self of which they are capable, and this includes love and even love in the face of unfair treatment. For the sixth grade guide, we have chosen the book *Island of the Blue Dolphins* by Scott O'Dell as a centerpiece. For the seventh grade guide, we have chosen the book, *The Mysterious Benedict Society* by Trenton Lee Stewart as a centerpiece.

Eighth Grade (ages 13-14) Forgiveness Curriculum

This guide extends the idea that adolescents can create positive identities that make lots of room for forgiveness as part of that identity. To that end, our focus here is on what we call “the forgiveness hero.” A hero in this context is someone who shows the virtues of courage and wisdom as he or she incorporates forgiveness into the emerging adolescent identity. We challenge each adolescent to be a hero, to live courageously by considering the difficult path of forgiveness. The centerpiece book here is *The Year the Swallows Came Early* by Kathryn Fitzmaurice.

Ninth Grade (ages 14-15) Forgiveness Guide

If you noticed, I did not entitle this subheading as a “Forgiveness Curriculum,” but instead referred to it as a “Forgiveness Guide.” This is because there is no formal class associated with the ninth grade forgiveness learning. The intent here, for example, is for teachers of English, History, Psychology, Civics, Anthropology, and Religion, to coordinate discussions of forgiveness. Each teacher who participates commits to teaching one to three lessons in which forgiveness is incorporated into the learning. For example, in History class, the teacher can focus on Martin Luther King, Jr. and his book, *Strength to Love*, in which he called for forgiveness of others during a tremendously challenging period when his house was being firebombed.

The DVD, *Forgiving Dr. Mengele*, describes the journey of Eva Moses Kor, as she struggles to forgive the doctor who experimented on her and her twin sister in the Auschwitz concentration camp. Teachers, who commit to this way of introducing forgiveness to ninth grade students, meet occasionally to coordinate efforts. The point of the ninth grade approach is to help the students see the ways in which thinking about forgiveness can be applied in different high school subjects and to the students’ own lives.

Tenth Grade (ages 15-16) Forgiveness Curriculum

Grade 10 (Course Two) curriculum begins with a review of the first phase of forgiveness, “Uncovering Your Anger” and other key concepts from Course One (Grade 9 Curriculum). It then reviews the remaining phases of forgiveness with an emphasis on Phase 2, “Deciding to Forgive.” Students should gain a deeper understanding of the following concepts:

- ▶ what it means to choose forgiveness,
- ▶ how choosing forgiveness gives meaning, purpose, and hope to pain caused from an injustice,
- ▶ how choosing forgiveness is a selfless gift of love towards the one who hurt you,
- ▶ the benefits of choosing forgiveness and bearing the pain as a gift of selfless love, and
- ▶ the consequences of not forgiving, of harboring the pain caused by injustice.

Course Two also focuses on the topic of “Bearing the Pain as a Gift of Selfless Love.” This topic involves understanding the value and importance of offering forgiveness as a gift of selfless love for the good of others, those who you care about and for your offender who is also a human being despite his or her actions. This gives meaning, purpose, and hope to our pain caused from an injustice or unfairness. It gives us a fuller picture in deciding to forgive.