



FORGIVENESS IN GAMES



DECIDING TO LET GO OF FEELINGS OF RESENTMENT OR VENGEANCE, EVEN IF THEY ARE JUSTIFIED.

Forgiveness is hard work. It's instinctual to seek revenge against those who hurt us; it shows our aggressors that it may not be worth the trouble to hurt us again. But forgiveness is also an instinctual response, one that is "hardwired" to keep our relationships healthy. When we forgive, we repair the damage that insults and betrayals and slights do to our relationships, so that we can continue to stay in connection with people who matter to us. Even some non-human animals make up with those who have hurt them. Research has shown that forgiveness also helps the forgiver even when the relationship cannot be saved or changed. Studies suggest that people who forgive are mentally and physically healthier than those who hold grudges. Remember that forgiving someone does not mean "giving in" or implying that the hurtful behavior was okay. Games that feature meaningful relationships have potential to address forgiveness. How would your game encourage players to feel or show forgiveness?

ELEMENTS TO ADD

- + Meaningful relationships both as a narrative element and in the ability to connect with NPCs or other players
- + Powerful characters who forgive instead of retaliate
- + Instances of betrayal, which opens the opportunity for forgiveness
- + Cooperative gameplay; when players rely on each other, they have the potential to be let down and then to forgive
- + Characters who try to retaliate but realize that letting go would be better
- + In social games, a community that models how players can productively express when they've been hurt
- + A community that is a safe space for someone to apologize and maintain contact with the group; being forgiven can be a good motivator to forgive others

ELEMENTS TO LEAVE OUT

- Completely individualistic play where players don't have to rely on anyone else
- Killing/violence as the primary goal or mechanic
- Themes of retaliation without reflection or growth on the part of characters
- A game community that lets negative behavior go unchecked, doesn't properly monitor player behavior, or doesn't model ways to share hurts, apologize, or forgive

COMMON PITFALLS

SINK OR SWIM

It's not enough just to provide the opportunity for betrayal or hurt by building a social game; make sure that you also have a plan for drawing attention to and monitoring interactions and helping players address conflicts in a productive way.

DON'T SAY IT'S OKAY IF YOU DON'T MEAN IT.

Forgiveness needs to be a choice for it to have meaning. Forcing players to forgive, or punishing them for not forgiving, may make the player resentful or feel they're being scolded. Both outcomes might result in a player distancing themselves from the game and any message it might be trying to share.

GAME GENRES & TYPES



MMO's and MOBA's



Story



Cooperative Play



Multi-player Strategy



Action/Adventure



Social Stimulation

SPECIFIC MECHANICAL REFERENCES

In *Kingdom Hearts* and *Dragon Age II*, the main characters face betrayal by companions they trusted and have to decide whether to retaliate or forgive.

In MMOs like *World of Warcraft*, players have opportunities to help and hurt one another, opening the door for interactions that prompt forgiveness if monitored in a helpful way.

In cooperative games, even quick mobile ones like the endless runner *Space Team*, players rely on one another to succeed; one person's mistakes can lead to everyone's failure, but the game manages to keep the mood lighthearted after the team loses.

In *Overwatch*, *Rocket League*, *League of Legends*, and *Ultimate Werewolf* (board game), players might need to forgive players for mistakes in previous rounds in order to move on to new rounds.

In *Chrono Trigger*, Crono and his party battle Magus, whom they believe is responsible for summoning Lavos, a world-destroying creature. After the battle, however, Magus' traumatic backstory is revealed. The player can then choose to kill Magus in battle or forgive him. If Magus is forgiven, he joins the player's party.

In *Valiant Hearts*, veterans have to try to live with the atrocities they committed during wartime, touching on themes of self-forgiveness.

In *Reign*, *Reign 2*, and *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, players have the power to forgive or punish others, and their decisions have consequences for the narrative.

In *The Sims 4*, if the player upsets an NPC, the player can make amends for it. Alternatively, if an NPC does something that upsets the player's character, the player can react in different ways that affect the strength of the relationship.

Halo series: When players "betray" a teammate during multiplayer matches, the betrayed teammate is prompted to either forgive or boot the offending player from the match.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR EMPATHY

Articles and videos at <http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/forgiveness>

McCullough, M. E. (2008, March 1). The forgiveness instinct. Greater Good Science Center. Retrieved from http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/forgiveness_instinct

The International Forgiveness Institute: <http://internationalforgiveness.com/>. See especially the collection of research studies by Robert Enright, Ph.D., available at <http://internationalforgiveness.com/research.htm>

Enright, R. (2001). Forgiveness is a choice: A step-by-step process for resolving anger and restoring hope. American Psychological Association.

Fred Luskin (2010). *Forgive for good: A proven prescription for health and happiness*. Harper Collins.