



# FORGIVENESS IN GAMES



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

Forgiveness is hard work. It's instinctual to feel anger toward and maybe even want and seek revenge against those who hurt us. Such feelings may help us keep those who offended or hurt us at a distance, keeping us safe. Forgiveness also serves an important purpose - it can help us maintain relationships, keeping us focused on the present relationship and not what happened (or didn't happen) in the past. When we forgive, we move away from the damage that insults, betrayals, and slights did to our relationship, and move into the present, to what's happening now, continuing to stay in connection with people who matter to us. Research has shown that forgiveness 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. Forgiving someone does not mean "giving in" or implying that the hurtful behavior was okay. Forgiving acknowledges that the transgression happened and that it was hurtful. And it allows us to move away from it, to focus on the present. Games can be designed intentionally to allow players to practice 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 model forgiveness instead of retaliation
- + 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 the option to rely on anyone else
- Killing or violence as the primary goal or mechanic
- Themes of retaliation that lack opportunities for reflection or growth on the part of the 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

#### A SOCIAL GAME IS NOT SUFFICIENT

Social games do provide the opportunity for betrayal or hurt; but that alone is insufficient to create opportunities to practice forgiveness. 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 players resentful or feel they're being scolded. Both outcomes might result in players distancing themselves from the game and not practicing authentic forgiveness.

## 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 the board game *Ultimate Werewolf*, 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. Only after the battle is Magus' traumatic backstory 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 and choose to forgive** which will affect the strength 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 FORGIVENESS

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](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>