

You Don't Need to Forgive: Trauma Recovery on Your Own Terms

Amanda Ann Gregory

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In *You Don't Need to Forgive*, trauma psychotherapist Amanda Ann Gregory challenges the assumption that forgiveness is a requirement for recovery.

Drawing on Gregory's dual experiences as a clinician and a survivor of childhood abuse and informed by a blend of research and expert interviews, the book treats forgiveness as an optional part of trauma recovery despite common therapeutic suggestions otherwise. It also exposes common actions that are mistaken for forgiveness, including condonation, rationalization, and event trauma responses. Corresponding advice for clinicians and survivors is included throughout.

Instead of relying on hearsay or techniques not grounded in research, Gregory reviews clinical studies on forgiveness and trauma recovery herself. She uncovers significant limitations in the studies that inform forgiveness therapy and similar modalities. Biases in sample size, self-selection, location, and demographics call the therapeutic potential of forgiveness into serious question. The book includes an incisive critique of the potential physical and emotional dangers that forgiveness therapy poses to patients, especially when it is done without their full consent.

Where does this leave trauma therapists and survivors? Reframing forgiveness as elective, Gregory notes that she never felt the urge to forgive her offenders. She also witnessed patients be pressured by forgiveness therapists to let go of complex or negative emotions toward their abusers at the risk of being dismissed from treatment. Instead of starting with forgiveness, she advises survivors to begin with establishing safety and shame reduction. She also advises clinicians to recognize a survivor's religious or cultural beliefs about forgiveness and shares advice from experts for incorporating these factors into a treatment plan.

You Don't Need to Forgive is a valuable resource for clinicians and patients that navigates questions of forgiveness with tact. It includes question sets to inspire reflection in its dual audiences throughout.

ANDY MINSHEW (January / February 2025)

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