This curriculum offers approximately 3 hours of instruction, divided into 3 sections. Each section can be broken into smaller pieces if you prefer short lessons. For additional resources, visit www.CharacterFirstEd.com.

SECTION 1
Introduce Forgiveness

DEFINING FORGIVENESS
(Discussion, 15 minutes)

Point out and discuss key words in the definition. Review and commit the definition to memory. Use the Forgiveness Character Card (sold separately) to remind or reward students who learn the definition.

Definition: Letting go of bitterness and revenge

The modern word forgiven comes from the Old English word forgiefan, meaning "to give up." When you forgive, you let go of bitterness in your heart and give up the desire for revenge.

Forgiveness is not a feeling, and it does not take away or excuse what others have done. Real forgiveness is recognizing the problem and all the pain and hurt that comes with it—and then choosing to let go of any bitterness, anger, and desire for revenge so you can move on with life.

If you don’t forgive or let go, your life starts to revolve around the other person and how you can get even. Resentment then leads you to act with the same selfishness the other person demonstrated, making the problem worse.

Forgiveness does not automatically remove the consequences of an offense. A student might forgive another student for an unkind remark, but the teacher might still send the offender to the principal’s office.

Forgiveness is not easy, and sometimes it is a long process to work through the situation, rebuild trust, and restore a relationship. Sometimes the relationship cannot be restored and things are never the same. Even then, the attitude of forgiveness clears your mind so you can work through the process and make the most of the future.

Related concepts:
conflict resolution, mediation, justice, mercy, restoration, peacemaking

Discussion:
- Why do you think forgiveness is important?
- What happens if you stay bitter and angry at someone?
- How does forgiveness show strength of character?
- What is the opposite of forgiveness? (bitterness, revenge, hatred)

“When you forgive, you in no way change the past—but you sure do change the future.” —Bernard Meltzer
CLEAR IT UP
(Exploration, 15 minutes)

Use a piece of paper, a pencil, and an eraser to illustrate the meaning of forgiveness.

Show students a sheet of paper with marks on it. Forgiveness is like erasing the marks so that you can use the paper again.

A forgiving person must recognize when others have done wrong. But instead of getting bitter and taking revenge—which is like adding marks to the page—a forgiving person chooses to let go of the anger and move on with life.

A forgiving person also admits mistakes and asks for forgiveness. This is more than just saying, “I’m sorry.” It is saying, “I was wrong. Will you forgive me?”

Don’t let anger, bitterness, hatred, and guilt ruin your life. Forgive those who hurt you and clear up your own mistakes.

**Supplies:** blank paper, pencil, eraser

CONSEQUENCES
(Discussion, 15 minutes)

Help students understand the role of consequences, punishment, justice, and forgiveness.

Forgiveness does not mean everything is okay, and it does not automatically remove the consequences of an offense.

Natural consequences might include broken trust, a physical injury, or lost time. Depending on the situation, this might be the only type of consequence that occurs.

Those in authority, such as a teacher or parent, might also impose structured consequences or punishment, such as restitution, extra work, or lost privileges. These serve as a reminder to not repeat the offense.

**Points to Ponder:**
- Forgive those who offend you, and let teachers administer justice in the classroom instead of taking things into your own hands.
- When someone offends you, consider whether it will seriously hurt your relationship, hurt others, or hurt the offender if it continues to happen. If the other person cuts in line, you might ignore the offense. If a family member has abused you or others, get help from someone you trust.

Visit www.CharacterFirstEd.com for additional teaching resources.

Forgiveness

Letting go of bitterness and revenge
Reinforcing Forgiveness

Even when children do something wrong, you still have an opportunity to praise them when they try to make things right. Here are tips for correction and reconciliation:

1. **Deal with misbehavior quickly** instead of putting it off. This shows students that the issue is important.

2. **Treat offenders with respect** instead of trying to shame or humiliate students. Speak in a calm voice. Step aside or into the hall where you can talk semi-privately.

3. **Clarify the issue.** Did the student know what you expected? Was it an accident? Was this a first offense or a repeat issue? Were others involved?

4. **Focus on the heart attitude.** Was this a lack of self-control, obedience, respect, honesty, responsibility, or attentiveness? Ask, “Do you see why this was wrong?”

5. **Allow for restoration.** If the student responds with remorse you can ask, “Do you want to make this right?” Do not take “I’m sorry” for an answer. Say, “I appreciate that you are sorry, but the way we clear things up is to ask for forgiveness. Can you do that?” Praise the student for responding this way, regardless of what consequences might follow.

6. **Look ahead.** Ask what the student should do the next time he or she is in this situation.

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I WILL...
(Discussion, 25 minutes)

1. **Acknowledge the pain.**
   You can’t heal a cut or scrape by pretending it didn’t happen, and you can’t resolve an offense by acting as if nothing occurred. Deal with problems before they get worse.
   - How does it feel to be ridiculed? How does it feel to be left out?
   - Who can you talk to about things like this? Who can you ask for help?

2. **Choose to forgive.**
   Forgiveness means working through the process of making things right and trying to restore a relationship. This does not mean the offender will become a close friend, but it does mean you will let go of bitterness.
   - What makes it difficult to forgive?
   - What happens to people who refuse to forgive?

3. **Not seek revenge.**
   Instead of seeking retaliation or revenge, let those in authority sort out what happened and administer justice.
   - Why is getting revenge a bad idea? How can this make the problem worse?
   - What is the difference between reporting a serious problem and being a “tattler” who wants to get someone in trouble?

4. **Ask for forgiveness when I do wrong.**
   It is easier to forgive others and let go of bitterness when you recognize how you also need to be forgiven.
   - How does it feel when someone forgives you?
   - Teach students how to ask for forgiveness (see role play on page 5). Demonstrate the process, then let students practice with one another.

5. **Move on with life.**
   Once you forgive, do not bring up the offense again, and do not allow yourself to dwell on what happened. Move on and make the most of the future.
   - Imagine a friend has hurt you deeply, but you talked about it and now it is in the past. How can you move on with life?
   - What if the other person doesn’t ask for forgiveness? How can you move on with life anyway?
WHAT DO YOU SEE?
(Exploration, 15 minutes)

Use this illustration to encourage students to dwell on the positive instead of only focusing on the negative.

Draw a noticeable spot on a piece of paper. Show the paper to your class and ask the students what they see. Many will point out the spot on the paper, what color it is, or a design they recognize. However, few students will probably point out the rest of the paper that is clean and unmarked.

This is similar to a person's outlook on life. It is easy to dwell on the hurtful and painful things that have occurred and overlook the many good things that have happened to you as well.

Forgiveness helps you move past the hurts, and gratefulness helps you dwell on the benefits and blessings of life. If you start feeling sad, angry, depressed, or upset, take a moment to ask yourself, "What do you see in this situation?"

Supplies: blank paper, marker

NO FISHING!
(Project, 25 minutes)

Use this activity to remind students to forgive offenses, let go of bitterness, and move on with life. Bring fishing gear to class for additional visual aids.

Forgiving someone is like throwing the offense into a lake. It is finished, washed away, and left alone.

Whenever you remember the offense, you show forgiveness by leaving it at the bottom of the lake and not bringing it up.

Remind yourself to forgive others by making a sign that says: "No Fishing!" Make the sign with paper and markers, and include the definition of forgiveness. Attach a craft stick to the paper if you wish to add a sign post.

Supplies: paper, scissors, tape, markers, craft sticks

Points to Ponder:
- Forgiveness is not a one-time event. You must choose to forgive each time you remember an offense.
- Focusing on old hurts is like opening old wounds. Forgive offenses properly and let the healing begin.

ASKING FOR FORGIVENESS
(Role Play, 25 minutes)

Show students how to properly ask for forgiveness, then let them practice this important life skill. Let students develop their own scenarios, too.

When done correctly, asking for forgiveness can help you clear up mistakes, rebuild trust, and restore friendships.

1. Take responsibility for your actions. There is a big difference between saying, "I'm sorry you got hurt," and saying, "I'm sorry that I hurt you." Own up to your mistakes instead of blaming others or making excuses.

2. Ask a question. Remember that forgiveness goes two directions. If you just say, "I'm sorry," that is one direction. But if you say, "I was wrong. Will you forgive me?" then you invite the person to respond.

3. Be genuine and humble. Forgiveness is more about your heart attitude than saying the right words. Are you truly sorry for what you have done, or just sorry you got caught?

Role Play Scenario:

Student: "Excuse me, teacher, do you have a minute? I need to ask you something."

Teacher: "Yes, go ahead."

Student: "I need to tell you that I cheated on my test last week. I realize I was wrong, and I wasn't being truthful. I'm not sure what you want to do, but will you forgive me for lying to you?"

Teacher: "Well, I am glad you told me the truth, and I do forgive you. Let me think about what to do about your test, and I will make a decision by tomorrow."

Student: "Thank you."

FORGIVENESS POEM
(Literacy Connection, 15 minutes)

Teach this poem as a way to memorize the five "I Wills." Watch the video at www.CharacterFirstEd.com.

I will not let hurt and bitterness destroy my life and friends.
I will choose to show forgiveness and I will not seek revenge.

I will ask forgiveness quickly when I realize I've done wrong.
I will try as much as possible to always get along.

My character is what will make a leader out of me.
So next time through, let's say it more ENTHUSIASTICALLY!
CORRIE TEN BOOM

The radio announced the awful news in May of 1940. The country of Holland fell to Nazi Germany, and the German police began sending Jewish families to prison camps where they would work, starve, and die.

Mr. ten Boom and his daughters, Betsie and Corrie, joined a movement to rescue as many Jews as possible. They even built a secret hiding place in Corrie’s bedroom to shelter those in need.

In 1944, the German police heard that the ten Booms were hiding Jews, so they took Betsie and Corrie to a prison camp called Ravensbruck. When the sisters learned who betrayed them, Corrie was filled with rage—but Betsie had compassion on the man. In time, Corrie also let go of her hate and chose to forgive.

Betsie died in prison camp, but a mistake in paperwork led to Corrie’s unexpected release. People around the world wanted to hear Corrie’s story, and she told them how love and forgiveness are more powerful than hate and bitterness.

After speaking to an audience in Germany, a former prison guard approached Corrie and asked for her forgiveness. For a long moment, Corrie struggled with memories of prison camp and her sister’s death. Then she extended her hand and said, “I forgive you, brother! With all my heart!”

Visit www.CharacterFirstEd.com to read more about Corrie ten Boom.

Sheep have a habit of wandering off and getting into trouble. This requires a patient and forgiving shepherd to lead the sheep back where they belong.

THE SHEEP & THE SHEPHERD
(Story, 15 minutes)

One bright, spring morning, a shepherd guided his sheep to a luscious green meadow on the side of a hill. As the sheep settled down to graze, the shepherd relaxed on the soft green grass, always keeping watch over his flock.

Not far away, a hungry mountain lion heard the sheep, so it started to move toward the grassy meadow. It quietly crept along the ground until the flock was in view. Then the mountain lion hid behind a rock and waited for an opportunity to strike.

As he rested on the hillside, the shepherd noticed a young sheep moving away from the safety of the flock. It jumped and played, nipping at a butterfly as it fluttered from flower to flower. The shepherd called for his sheep, which turned toward the shepherd and started back to the flock.

As the sheep rejoined the group, the shepherd closed his eyes for a minute and enjoyed the warm sunshine. He thought of how many times this particular sheep had wandered away and how dangerous that was. Fortunately, the shepherd rescued his sheep before something bad happened, but when would the young sheep learn its lesson?

Just then, the butterfly flew in front of the young sheep and down a path away from the meadow. The sheep began chasing the butterfly again, and soon the sheep was down the path and out of sight. When the young sheep lost interest in the butterfly, it looked around…and panicked! The sheep was lost! The meadow, the flock, and the shepherd were all out of sight!

The sheep started to run, frantically looking for the meadow. But as it ran, the sheep tripped over a rock, tumbled down into a deep ravine, and landed in a thornbush. The sheep’s wool got tangled in the thorns and the sheep couldn’t get away. Worse yet, when the sheep tried to stand, pain shot up through its leg because its leg bone had been broken during the fall.

The young sheep had no way to escape. It was helpless and alone, stuck in a thornbush at the bottom of a ravine with a broken leg. Desperate for help, the sheep cried out for the shepherd to rescue it. The sound of “Baa, Baa” echoed through the ravine, down the path, and all the way into the ears of…the mountain lion!
What a perfect opportunity for a mountain lion to catch an easy meal. It quietly crept along the hillside, following the sound of the sheep's cry until it reached the ravine. It looked below, and there was the helpless creature. The mountain lion crouched in preparation to attack. Its muscles tensed, its back arched, and just as it leaped into the air...WHACK!

The mountain lion flew into the air and landed beyond the sheep in the deep ravine. It quickly jumped to its feet and looked up, only to see the shepherd with his staff, ready to take another swing at the big cat. The mountain lion looked at the sheep, looked at the shepherd, and then ran off to find an easier meal.

Immediately, the shepherd climbed down the ravine to rescue his sheep. He pulled the thorns out of its wool, placed the sheep on top of his shoulders, and carried his young animal back to the flock.

The shepherd continued carrying the sheep for many days until its leg healed. Thanks to the shepherd's care and concern, everything was made whole again. The sheep learned a valuable lesson, and life went on thanks to the kind and forgiving shepherd.

When you do something wrong like the young sheep, forgiveness means admitting your mistake, asking for forgiveness, and making things right. And when others hurt or offend you, forgiveness means letting go of bitterness and responding like the kind shepherd — so you can make the most of the future.

Visit www.CharacterFirstEd.com to watch a video of the forgiveness story.

WOOLLY SHEEP
(Project, 25 minutes)

Help students work through the process of forgiving others and asking for forgiveness.

Sheep's wool is very forgiving. It stretches when pulled, it sheds water when it rains, and it even resists fire.

Use the sheep's wool as an illustration of forgiveness. Trace a sheep on a piece of heavy paper and cut it out, or download this activity sheet from www.CharacterFirstEd.com.

On one side of the sheep, list things others have done to offend or hurt you. Forgiveness means letting go of the bitterness in your heart and putting it behind you. To show this, glue several cotton balls over the list of offenses and cover them up like sheep's wool.

On the other side of the sheep, list ways you have hurt others—even if you didn't mean to hurt them. Go to those you have offended and ask for their forgiveness. Glue cotton balls over your list of offenses as a symbol of clearing up your mistakes and making things right.

Supplies: heavy paper, cotton balls, scissors, glue, pencils
OVERVIEW: Forgiveness is a choice to let go of bitterness and revenge so you can move on with life. Forgiveness does not mean overlooking an offense or ignoring when someone does wrong. Real forgiveness is recognizing the problem and all the pain and hurt that comes with it—and then working through the process of making things right. If you don’t forgive or let go, your life starts to revolve around the other person and how you can get revenge, which makes the problem worse.

Forgiveness
Definition: Letting go of bitterness and revenge

I WILL...
- Acknowledge the pain.
- Choose to forgive.
- Not seek revenge.
- Ask for forgiveness when I do wrong.
- Move on with life.

The wool of a sheep is very forgiving. It stretches when pulled, it sheds water when it rains, and it even resists fire.

CHARACTER QUIZ:
1. Why is forgiveness better than bitterness and revenge?
2. How does it feel when someone forgives you?
4. Even if people forgive one another, there still might be consequences: TRUE? or FALSE?
5. Why is it better to admit your mistakes and ask for forgiveness instead of trying to cover up what happened?