**Ways to Use VIA Character Strengths**

**Tayyab Rashid, Ph.D., University of Toronto Scarborough, Canada**

**Afroze Anjum, Psych.D, Toronto District School Board, Canada**

**CORE VIRTUE: TEMPERANCE**

**protecting against excess**

**I. Forgiveness and Mercy:** This strength involves forgiving those who have wronged or offended us. Forgiveness entails accepting the shortcomings of others, giving people a second chance, and putting aside the temptation to hold a grudge or behave vengefully. Forgiveness allows one to put aside the self-destructive negativity associated with anger and to extend mercy toward a transgressor.

**Too much:** permissiveness

**Too little:** mercilessness

**Movies:**

1. *Incendies* (2010, France/Canada) With a series of flashbacks, Incendies follows the journey of twin brother and sister as they try to uncover the attempt to unravel the mystery of their mother's life which unsettles them but the strength of forgiveness helps them to reconcile with the past.

2. *Pay it Forward* (2000) – Trevor McKinney is a young boy living in fear of an alcoholic mother and an abusive father. When his social studies teacher assigns the class to put into action a plan to change the world, he sets in motion a chain of kindness and forgiveness that extends far beyond his small social circle. This movie provides a poignant example of how much impact a simple act of forgiveness can have.

3. *Terms of Endearment* (1983) – This film traces the sometimes tumultuous relationship between a mother and daughter. Through the ups and downs of the mother’s marriage and the daughter’s involvement with a retired astronaut, the pair finds ways to see past each other’s transgressions and find joy in their relationship.

4. *Dead Man Walking* (1995) – This movie follows the developing relationship between a nun and a condemned man living out his last days on death row. It presents the difficulties and paradoxes of mercy in vivid detail, interspersing tender moments with clips of the brutal crime in question. Ultimately, this subtle and emotional movie demonstrates that forgiveness is possible even under the worst of circumstances.

5. *Ordinary People* (1980) – An affluent family in suburban Chicago lives in various stages of denial after the accidental death of one of their sons, unable to express their emotions or deal with their grief. Only after the surviving son attempts suicide and begins to see a psychiatrist do the barriers begin to come down, and at that point the family must deal with their strained relationships and haunting past.

***Suggested Actions***

1. Remember times when you offended someone and were forgiven, then extend this gift to others. Don’t demand a formal apology.

2. Evaluate your emotions before and after forgiving someone. Compare these emotions to your feelings when you hold a grudge.

3. Understand from the offender’s perspective why he/she offended you. Then assess whether your reaction is hurting you more than the offender.

4. Make a list of individuals against whom you hold a grudge, then either meet them personally to discuss it or visualize whether bygones can be bygones. Put the original offense into its proper context and perspective.

5. Meet a person who offended you in the past, especially if he/she is a family member. Tell them that you have forgiven them, or just be kind in your interaction with them.

6. Ask for forgiveness from a Divine power according to your faith. Assess how you feel afterwards.

7. Pray for the noble behavior of your offender. Think of ways that this person has acted nobly in the past.

8. Identify how a grudge tortures you emotionally. Does it produce disruptive emotions (anger, hatred, fear, worry, sadness, anxiety, jealousy and such)? Write three ways these disruptive emotions affect your behavior.

9. Plan out what your response should be the next time someone offends you. Remind yourself of your plan (rehearse if possible) and periodically affirm, “No matter how he/she offends me, I will respond as I have planned.”

10. Imagine your offender and consider whether you have any payback fantasies. Imagine in detail what might happen if you forgive the offender. Journal your reactions. Start with a moderate offense and continue until you achieve forgiveness and resolution. During this exercise continuously remind yourself that this is a forgiving exercise, not a grudge-holding one.