

Unforgivable?

Living With What Cannot Be Undone

A live online webinar with

Dr Gwen Adshead & Professor Chris Cook

Zoom Webinar

24 March 2027, Wednesday

Times:

5:00 pm – 8:00 pm, London UK

1:00 pm – 4:00 pm, New York, USA

CPD hours: 3



Location: Online streaming only

(all our webinar tickets now include complimentary access to a video recorded version for 1 year or 3 years, depending on the ticket type)

The Clinical Challenge

"I know she is sorry, but I still cannot forgive her."

"I did something terrible to someone I loved. I cannot undo it. I can't live with the guilt of what I've done."

When we are seriously wronged by someone we love — or come to recognise that we have seriously wronged them — the aftermath is seldom merely psychological. Questions of guilt, responsibility, forgiveness and repair become entwined with attachment and identity and, for some clients, with deeply held spiritual or religious beliefs.

Clients may arrive in therapy carrying anger, grief, bewilderment, guilt or a powerful sense that what happened should never have happened. They may want an apology that does not come, forgiveness they cannot offer, or absolution that another person is unwilling to give. Others may feel pressure from family, community or faith to forgive, reconcile or "move on" before they are ready — or when doing so would be unsafe.

This places the therapist in difficult territory. Are we helping someone recover from an attachment rupture, helping them make sense of what the wrongdoing means, or both? Does psychological recovery require forgiveness? What happens when the client sitting opposite us is not only the person who was wronged, but also the person who caused the harm? Psychotherapy does not take place outside moral life: clients bring beliefs about loyalty, responsibility, betrayal, repentance, punishment, forgiveness and what a "good" person ought to do, shaped by family, culture, religion, spirituality and personal moral commitments.

Serious relational injury also reaches beyond moral judgement. It can destabilise trust, identity and assumptions about self and other. Someone who has been betrayed may present with "trust issues", but what



has been shaken may be more fundamental: their expectation that another person can be relied upon at all; someone who caused harm may struggle to hold together the ideas “I did something seriously wrong” and “I am more than the worst thing I have done”; someone whose faith teaches forgiveness may experience profound spiritual conflict when forgiveness feels impossible; and someone who longs for reconciliation may discover that the other person does not want it.

This three-hour webinar brings together Dr Gwen Adshead and Professor Chris Cook to explore the psychological, relational, moral and spiritual consequences of wrongdoing within close relationships. The aim is not to teach therapists how to persuade clients to forgive, nor to reduce relational harm to attachment theory, spiritual belief or diagnostic categories. Instead, the webinar asks what therapy can offer when something genuinely consequential has happened between people and there may be no complete repair, no restoration of trust and no morally satisfying ending.

The therapeutic task is often to think accurately enough about agency, context, attachment and responsibility at the same time — resisting the temptation either to explain wrongdoing so thoroughly that responsibility disappears, or to judge it so completely that psychological understanding becomes impossible.

Gwen Adshead: Attachment, Rupture and Responsibility

Dr Gwen Adshead will explore how relational ruptures arise and why they can be so psychologically destabilising. From an attachment perspective, the person who harms us is often someone on whom our sense of safety, trust or belonging has depended. When that same person becomes the source of betrayal, abandonment, violence or rejection, the rupture can affect not only the relationship itself but the client’s internal representations of self and other.

Gwen will consider how denial, minimisation, idealisation, rage, withdrawal and other responses may function after serious relational harm, and how therapists can understand these without rushing towards reconciliation or separation as the obvious solution. A central question will be how to work with the client who cannot reconcile the person they loved with the person who harmed them.

The webinar will also examine the position of the person who has caused harm. Psychotherapy has become increasingly sophisticated in understanding trauma and victimisation; it can be considerably less comfortable when the client asks us to think with them about harm they themselves have caused. Here, the task may involve supporting acknowledgement and responsibility without explaining away what happened — while also preventing responsibility from becoming a verdict on the whole self. There is a clinically important difference between “I did something wrong” and “I am irredeemably bad”.

Chris Cook: Spiritual Distress, Forgiveness and Making Amends

Professor Chris Cook will extend the discussion into spirituality, moral distress and forgiveness. For some clients, questions such as “Should I forgive?”, “Can I be forgiven?”, “Do I have a duty to reconcile?”, “Can I make amends?” and “What does repentance require?” are inseparable from religious or spiritual beliefs. These frameworks may provide meaning, hope and a language for repair; they may also intensify distress. A client may believe that refusing forgiveness makes them morally deficient, or may feel pressured by family or faith community to restore a relationship they no longer consider safe. Someone who has caused harm may seek spiritual forgiveness while continuing to avoid meaningful accountability to the person harmed; another may have made every available effort to repair the damage and still be unable to forgive themselves. Chris will therefore examine forgiveness not as a therapeutic prescription but as a psychologically, culturally and spiritually complex process. The webinar will distinguish forgiveness from reconciliation, restored trust, absolution and forgetting, and ask whether forgiveness requires any of these. It will also consider whether someone can live responsibly after wrongdoing when the injured person never forgives them, and whether psychological recovery may sometimes require accepting that forgiveness will not happen.

Where the Psychological and Spiritual Perspectives Meet

These distinctions matter because therapists can inadvertently communicate assumptions about what successful recovery should look like: that anger must eventually soften, estranged family members should reconnect, remorse should culminate in self-forgiveness, or “moving forward” requires leaving the moral significance of what happened behind. However, our clients may need something different: to recognise that refusing reconciliation is not the same as remaining psychologically trapped; to mourn the person they

thought someone was; or to construct an ethical life after causing harm for which there can never be full restitution.

Some situations involve clear and markedly unequal responsibility; others are more entangled, with the same person occupying different positions of harmed and harming over time. Therapy needs to make room for that complexity without allowing psychological understanding to blur responsibility.

The webinar does not offer a formula for resolving the unresolvable. Its purpose is to help therapists work with greater clarity when suffering is bound up not only with attachment and loss, but with a wrong that cannot be undone — whether the client is living with what someone they loved has done to them, or with what they themselves have done to someone else.

Who This Webinar Is For

- Psychotherapists, psychologists and counsellors working with clients navigating infidelity, betrayal or the aftermath of an affair
- Therapists supporting clients affected by addiction-related harm within a relationship — whether as the person harmed or the person whose addiction caused the harm
- Practitioners working with estrangement or rupture between parents and adult children
- Therapists whose clients bring religious, spiritual or cultural beliefs about forgiveness, repentance or duty into the room
- Therapists working with clients who remain caught in anger, grief, guilt or unresolved moral conflict when no satisfactory repair is possible

Learning Objectives

By the end of this webinar, participants will be able to:

1. Differentiate relational rupture, attachment injury, moral distress and spiritual distress, and consider how each may shape a client's presentation following betrayal, abandonment, violence, addiction-related harm or rejection.
2. Recognise the psychological consequences of serious wrongdoing within attachment relationships, including disruptions to trust, identity, representations of self and other, and expectations of future relationships.
3. Explore guilt, remorse and responsibility with clients who have caused harm without colluding with denial or minimisation, while also avoiding global self-condemnation as the only alternative to exoneration.
4. Distinguish forgiveness from reconciliation, restored trust, absolution and forgetting, and assess when assumptions about forgiveness may be complicating rather than facilitating therapeutic work.
5. **Work more sensitively with religious, spiritual, cultural and family beliefs about forgiveness, repentance, duty and reconciliation, particularly where these beliefs create conflict or pressure for the client.**
6. Recognise how assumptions about closure, repair, reconciliation and “moving on” can shape therapeutic direction, and support clients in developing a psychologically and ethically viable life when forgiveness, reconciliation or restitution remain incomplete.

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