

Lesson 27



Area: Apologize

Title: **The Soft Voice of Forgiveness**

Objective: Students will reflect on a story of forgiveness.

Materials: “The Soft Voice of Forgiveness” Story

Activity: Read the story “The Soft Voice of Forgiveness” out loud to the class.

Closure: Ask students to reflect in their journals or hold a class discussion on the following questions:

1. “How do you think Stephanie felt when she discovered her wallet stolen?”
2. “How do you think Stephanie feels now?”
3. “How do you think Dustin feels now?”
4. “Why do you think Stephanie said, ‘I forgive you.’”



The Soft Voice of Forgiveness Story

Directions: Read the following story. For use with the lesson “The Soft Voice of Forgiveness”.

As the feeling of betrayal is the worst feeling ever for me,
forgiveness is probably the best.

- Rae B. Rames

Dear Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul,

We hear so many negative things about teenagers and certainly some episodes concern us all. But we need to be sure to spread the good news, too, and I feel the following is indeed good news.

As a vice principal of a high school for many years, I was a pretty good judge of character and nothing surprised me. That was until I got to know a soft-spoken teenager named Stephanie. She entered my office in tears one day when her wallet had been stolen out of her backpack during chemistry class. Her classmates had seen another student, Dustin, take her wallet.

When I summoned Dustin to my office, he admitted taking the wallet to the restroom and looking in it. He would not, however, confess to taking the money even though the empty wallet was found in the restroom. I told him that since he took the wallet, he was now responsible for replacing its contents. He had one week to bring the money, or I would suspend him for stealing which, as a violation of the school athletic code, would also mean he would be off the track team.

I tried to call Dustin's father all that afternoon, but the phone was always busy. Finally at 7:00 p.m., I managed to contact him and told him of the incident. He assured me that Dustin would return the money.

A week flew by, and Stephanie stood meekly in my doorway once more. With downcast eyes and a sad smile on her face, she said that Dustin had not yet returned the money. I tried Dustin's father's work number again and this time was able to get through right away. What a shock it was for me to hear a different voice. He was clearly not the person I had talked to the week before. I quickly explained the theft of the wallet, telling him that I had given Dustin a chance to save face by returning the money. Dustin had not only ignored the opportunity, but had compounded his error by impersonating his father on the phone and withholding the truth from him. Dustin's

father said that he didn't take this lightly and insisted on bringing Dustin in personally, after his suspension was over, to meet with Stephanie and me.

During the conference, while we waited for Stephanie to come to my office, Dustin's father filled me in on some background. Up until two years before, Dustin had lived with his mother in Los Angeles until she could no longer deal with his rebellious nature. He had come to Sacramento to live with his father who much more of a disciplinarian. Dustin was having a difficult time making the adjustment, as was his father, a single, working parent. His father appreciated my willingness to work with Dustin, rather than merely dole out punishment, as was done in the Washington D.C. high school he himself had attended as a teenager. He confided that if he had done what Dustin had, he would have been sent to juvenile hall and immediately locked up.

When Stephanie arrived, Dustin squirmed in his chair and crossed his arms. His father introduced himself to Stephanie and apologized to her on Dustin's behalf. Dustin kept his face blank, staring at a picture on my wall. After a long pause, his father prompted him to speak to her. "Dustin, don't you have something to say?" Dustin shrugged his shoulders but stayed put, glaring at his father whose eyes had suddenly narrowed. Through clenched teeth, he said, "Say it, Dustin. Now!" Walking over to Stephanie,, Dustin reluctantly handed her a closed envelope and begrudgingly muttered, "I'm sorry I took your wallet. Here's your money." Stephanie looked at him with wide brown eyes and gently said, "I forgive you."

Stunned, Dustin stared at her in disbelief. He blinked his eyes and grimaced, as if the spotlight had suddenly been turned on him.

After both students had returned to class, Dustin's father stayed to talk with me. He shared with me that he had recently taken Dustin to a therapist to begin working on the root of his behavioral problems. Some trauma had happened to Dustin around the age of eight, and, now that it had been uncovered, counseling might help him get rid of his self-destructive tendencies and improve his self-esteem. I told him that I was glad to hear he was seeking professional help for his son and promised to keep in touch with him if any more problems arose. They never did.

Dustin stayed on the track team, went on to excel academically, and was never referred to this office again. Through ongoing counseling, he was eventually able to accept and even like himself. Stephanie had shown him the way. By forgiving him, she taught him how to forgive himself. I often think of Stephanie because, on the surface, she looked like a fragile flower that might drop its petals at the slightest breeze. But she had me fooled. Inside, where it really counts, she was invincible, using her wisdom, power, and courage to help a classmate who needed to turn his life around. Laurence Sterne once wrote: "Only the brave know how to forgive." Meek and soft-spoken Stephanie turned out to be the bravest one of all.

Thanks so much,

Jennifer Martin