

Welcome to *How to Hold a Grudge*. I'm Sophie Hannah, bestselling crime writer, creator and host of this podcast, and author of the world's first ever book on the specific subject of grudges. Many of us believe it's always wrong and bad for us to hold a grudge – but what if our grudges, when handled correctly, can be positively good for us, and for others? What if grudges are actually great: not a cause for guilt, but exactly what we need to lead a happier, safer, more fulfilled life? If you're intrigued and want to know more, you can listen to a new episode of this podcast every Thursday between now and 27 December. Join me and guests to find out how to use grudges to transform your life for the better, and to make the world a more peaceful and compassionate place.

And now ... Episode Eight: Listeners' Questions, Answered.

So, first of all, I want to say a huge 'thank you' to everybody who has listened to this podcast or seen my references to it on Twitter or Facebook or anywhere and sent in their thoughts and questions on the subject of grudges. When I originally planned to have a 'Listeners' Questions, Answered' episode, I had no idea whether anyone would send me any questions or any views or any thoughts, and I was a bit worried that no one would.

But actually, I've had an amazing response. So, I'm gonna dive into your questions and I'm gonna answer them.

So, okay. This one came from Debbie. I've actually changed her name because she didn't say in her email whether she was okay with me using her real name. So, her real name was not Debbie, and she asked: *If someone has a grudge against you and if you were totally unaware of anything you did wrong – so you didn't know you'd done anything wrong but then you become aware they've got this grudge against you – and you try as hard as you possibly can to make up for the original transgression – you do everything you can to put things right. You behave in a really nice way to the person, you let them know you didn't really want to offend them, whatever...* I mean, Debbie didn't actually say what the grudge was and what she'd done to try and make it right, but she did make it clear that for some time she'd been doing everything she possibly could to show the person who was holding the grudge against her that she was sorry, that she didn't mean to cause any offense, and that she wanted to put it right.

And so Debbie's question was, If you do all of that and the person holding the grudge against you still carries on basically behaving in a cold, unfriendly, and withdrawn way – if, in other words, they let you know with their behaviour that none of the efforts you're making are gonna cut any ice with them; they're just gonna be unfriendly and basically not like you from now on – what do you do? Should you keep trying? Should you accept that – you know – you've done your best and at a certain point, if they want to still have that grudge in spite of your best efforts, you just let them get on with it? What should you do? What's the appropriate response?

Well. So, first of all, if the person who has the grudge about you is behaving in an actually unfriendly way – if they're being cold or unpleasant or overtly unfriendly – then that is not okay. What would be okay is if they decided that as a result of what they saw as a grudge-worthy incident that they didn't want to spend as much time with you or they didn't want to have you in their life any more, well, there's nothing you can do about that. But it sounds very much from Debbie's email as though this person is not cutting her out of their life, is allowing her to remain in their life, and just being generally unpleasant.

So, that in itself is grudge-worthy, really. And if you didn't realise you did anything wrong, but then you see that you've upset somebody, and you really go out of your way to try and put it right and they respond to you with unfriendliness and signals that you are not forgiven, then what I would say is, yes, at a certain point you are absolutely correct to stop trying. Because what that person is demonstrating is that they don't care how hard you try – they don't care what you do – they don't care how much you want to make up for the fact that you upset them in the first place – they are gonna continue to cold-shoulder you. And so I would say, they're not making any effort. They're not making any effort to repair things or to ensure a future happy relationship.

And so, when the other person is making no effort, it's absolutely justifiable and right to decide that you're not going to make any effort either. So, I would absolutely stop trying with that person. None of us is under any obligation to keep trying and keep trying and beg forgiveness. I mean, if we think we've done something wrong to somebody and we see they have a grudge about that, then yes, we should absolutely apologise and do what we can to put that right. But, you know, that can't be allowed to carry on for people.

There are people ... You know, I used to have somebody in my life for whom one apology was never enough. If you started apologising to this person at, say, 8 o'clock, it would usually be roughly 10 o'clock before they said, 'Okay, I

forgive you. Let's move on.' And I was too naïve at the time to say, at ten past eight, 'Okay, I've said sorry, I am sorry, now it's up to you. You know, you can either forgive me or not, but I'm not gonna sit here begging for forgiveness for the next two hours.'

So, yeah, Debbie, I would say, stop trying. You've tried already. The person still wants to be unfriendly, so you can just accept that you've done all you can. The fact that you've made that effort to put things right is really good. The fact that they've responded in a cold and unpleasant way – that's bad karma for them. And their behaviour towards you sounds really grudge-worthy and you can have a grudge about that. You need to protect yourself from future involvement with somebody who can behave in such a sort of ungenerous and punitive way.

Okay, so then there was another question that I was sent, which was a scenario where somebody – a married man with children – lied one evening and went off to spend the evening with his mistress, leaving his wife and children at home on their own. And while he was out, dishonestly seeing his mistress, some burglars broke into the house and attacked his family. So, something really bad happened that, if he had been in the house that evening, the person who emailed me this grudge said, it wouldn't have happened. Or, at least, there was a good chance that he could have, you know, stopped this thing from happening. But without his presence, his wife and kids and the house couldn't defend themselves against these attackers.

And the grudge is not because he was out of the house. It's because he was out of the house for a bad and dishonourable reason. So, the emailer made it clear that if, for example, this husband had been out of the house quite legitimately buying some groceries and this terrible thing had happened to occur while he was out of the house on, you know, legitimate and not immoral business, then she would not have held a grudge against this man. Because the reason he wasn't there was that he was with his mistress ... it's not that she'll always blame him for what happened, because it was the intruders and not him that did the terrible things, but she will always have a grudge about him as well. And she will always hold him a bit responsible because if he hadn't been out of the house behaving in this not ideal way, then he could maybe have protected his family from this attack.

So, that is actually really interesting because that is a grudge that you hold about somebody when something really bad happens, and that really bad thing is not their fault but they are at fault significantly in some other way that has

an impact on the bad thing that happened; that if they hadn't been at fault in this other area, then the bad thing couldn't have happened. And so, it's a really interesting grudge type, that, actually. I don't know what we can call it. I think it needs some kind of classification or name. But what's interesting about that particular type of grudge is that it feels as though there's a causal relationship.

And many of you who read a lot of fiction or who watch a lot of movies will actually recognise that kind of scenario. So, I mean, I've lost count of the number of books I've read in which it's usually a woman is having some amazing affair with some really hot guy who isn't her husband, and she gets back from a really amazing, fulfilling, and exciting night in a hotel with this man, and discovers that all her pet cats and her children and her husband have all drowned in a bathtub. And, you know, clearly the story is saying, you know, if you do wrong and sinful things then watch out, your entire family might drown in a bathtub. And there's never a direct causal relationship, but it feels as though there is. It feels in those kinds of narratives as though the person is being punished for that immorality. And I think this grudge that was sent in to me is very similar.

So, this chap who went out to spend the evening with his mistress couldn't possibly have known that him leaving his wife and kids on their own that night would have this disastrous result, but it feels as though his bad actions is linked to the disastrous results. So, that is ... Yeah, what I would say about that is, it's an absolutely valid grudge, but really the grudge about him should only be about his behaviour. It's absolutely fine and natural that you would almost associate that with what happened as a result of his bad behaviour, but you should also acknowledge that that particular result is not directly his fault. But yeah, you would absolutely – I would too – hold a grudge about the fact that he did this bad thing on that night, and if he hadn't done it, you know, that wouldn't have happened. So, yeah. That's a really understandable and interesting grudge.

Okay. So, this next question is actually about my book, not the podcast. It's about my book, *How to Hold a Grudge*. And the person wants to know something about what I said about Eckhart Tolle. So, what I say about Eckhart Tolle in my book is that what he says in *The Power of Now*, which is his famous and bestselling self-help book – he says that we make ourselves suffer by the stories we tell ourselves about what's happened. So, you can see the direct relationship to the grudge situation here. If I tell myself a grudge story in which someone has treated me unfairly, then I might make myself suffer whereas if I

tell myself a different story, I might not suffer. I could tell myself a story that didn't contain the fact that something unfair happened.

Let's say the story was about theft. I could tell myself the story, *Andrew stole a thousand pounds from me. The absolute rotter. How dare he? He's a cheat and a liar and I'm, you know, never gonna leave him unsupervised in my handbag again.* Eckhart Tolle would advise me not to tell myself that story because that's gonna make me angry and might make me suffer. He would say, 'Tell yourself a different story.' That story might be, *I used to have a thousand pounds. Now that thousand pounds is in the possession of Andrew.* And if you tell yourself the story in that way, well, there's nothing to be angry about. It's just a selection of facts.

But the person who emailed me about this said, 'Well, that doesn't work, does it? Because what Eckhart Tolle is advising people to do is to tell themselves the *wrong* story. And, so, if it's the wrong story then it's not a legitimate way of avoiding that suffering.'

I mean, obviously, I don't subscribe to Eckhart Tolle's method of story-telling. I think we should tell ourselves and formalise our grudge stories and in those stories, obviously, people are gonna be treating us badly and wrongly and unfairly. That's why they're grudge stories. I would advocate telling yourself that story in a way that feels true to you, and it wouldn't feel true – certainly not to me – if it didn't contain an accurate description of what happened and, if there's any fault involved, who was at fault.

Now, that doesn't mean that what Eckhart Tolle is advocating is telling yourself a story that's a lie, because the stories he's suggesting we tell are factually true. So, in the Andrew theft scenario, it would be factually true that I used to have a thousand pounds and that Andrew now has that thousand pounds. There's a lot missing from that story that I would regard as relevant, which is why my grudge story would be much more detailed and would contain the fact that Andrew unreasonably stole that money from me. But it's not wrong. So, Eckhart Tolle is not saying we should literally lie to ourselves, but he's saying we should find a way to look at the circumstances of what's happened in a way that takes the sting out of it.

Another question that's been sent in is ... *Why do I hold grudges and my family don't, and is it fair that they think they're better than me because of that?*

So, this is really interesting. There is a whole chapter in my book *How to Hold a Grudge* about what kinds of people hold grudges and what kinds of people don't. So, there are things – characteristics that we might have – that make us more or less likely to hold grudges. And so, I think I've mentioned in a previous episode that I am a real dedicated and regular grudge-holder, and my husband is someone who does not hold grudges at all. He just doesn't retain the information in his mind about things that have happened in the past that would enable him to create those grudges and keep them and maintain them, and the fact that I do hold grudges and he doesn't is because we're very, very different kinds of people in a whole range of ways.

And in this chapter in my book, I go through all the ways. So, one of them is, how much are we living in the moment, compared to very aware of the past and thinking about the future? One of them is, how easy do we find it to express negative feelings openly? How good are we at having discussions in situations of conflict? How good are we at standing up to people? How detail-focussed are we? If you're someone who is really aware of small details and who notices everything, you're more likely to hold grudges. If you're a kind of a broad picture, trying not really to notice anything unless you absolutely have to, then you're more likely to skip over details and then you will probably have fewer grudges.

So, there's a whole range of factors. If you've experienced oppression or tyranny, you're much more likely to form grudges in future. If you've generally been treated well and fairly, then you might not feel that need to protect yourself from other people. And that is a big part of the desire to hold grudges, the idea that we really need to have these grudges in place when appropriate to protect ourselves as we go through life dealing with other people. Another thing that can really influence how likely we are to hold a grudge – and this is a slightly weird one to get your head round – is, how naturally forgiving are we, and how much does that worry us?

So, just to use me as an example, my natural instincts are quite naïve, and that might surprise you, given that I've been talking to you now for weeks about grudges and bad behaviour and the need to protect ourselves. I might sound the opposite of naïve, but that's what I've produced and created in order to go through life with a measure of protection in place. My natural instinct is a very naïve one, to just assume that people are generally good and kind and forgiving, and even if someone seems really dodgy they're probably lovely. And I really want to be able to keep everyone in my life and not cut anyone off and not be wary of people. But I know that in the past my desire to make the best

of everyone and see the best in everyone has landed me in some real trouble, because I've ended up allowing myself to be bullied and oppressed. I've ended up being really naïve about people to a frankly ridiculous extent and then realising too late. And because I know that this is my natural tendency, I feel that I need to have my grudge-holding system as a balance to that.

Whereas if you're someone who can quite happily say, 'Oh, well, that person's clearly an arsehole and I'm never gonna see them again,' well, you don't need to have a grudge-holding system, because the minute you decide someone's not great, and you might decide that quite readily, then that's it. You don't think about them anymore. They're not in your life anymore. I really hate the idea of cutting anyone out of my life, or of being unfriendly, uncharitable, uncompassionate to anybody. When I think of people who have done me most harm in my life in the most reprehensible ways, I'm still nice to all of them. I would still – if any of them ever said, 'I've just realised that I behaved really awfully and I'm so sorry,' I would cancel out those grudges straight away. I am naturally someone who always wants to be able to give second chances, even to people who've done really, really bad things. For me, it's kind of the death of hope to think somebody is banished and awful and condemned forever.

But this is really dangerous and I've suffered the ill effects of my own naivety many, many times, so I need my grudges. Somebody who is much more nonsense wouldn't maybe feel the same need for grudges.

So, in answer to this particular person's question, *Why do I hold grudges and my family don't, and is it fair that they think they're better than me because of that?* ... No! It's not fair. I'm obviously gonna say that. I hold grudges. I love my grudges, and I don't think I'm worse than anyone else because I hold these grudges. I don't think I'm worse than my husband. I have a better memory than him, and I just have a different personality type from him.

Another question. *You say that sugar-coating is bad, but what about telling someone that you think their grudge isn't grudge-worthy?* Interesting question. So, first of all, those are two very different things. Sugar-coating is where you kind of pour forth a lot of positive-sounding things like 'Forgive! Move on! Don't hold a grudge!' but actually it's unhelpful and unsupportive because it's kind of invalidating the person who has the grudge and it's making them feel as though they ought to be guilty – they ought to feel guilty for having this grudge, and there's something wrong with them if they don't just immediately adopt a set of positive feelings. So, that's what sugar-coating is. And that is very different from telling someone that you think their grudge isn't grudge-worthy.

So, I think I understand what the questioner means. I think what they mean is, if you want to ... you know, you don't want to invalidate somebody. You don't want to make them feel guilty for having a grudge, you don't want to make things any worse for them, and you don't want to be unsupportive. But what if you really think that their grudge is bonkers, and that they shouldn't have it and it's a silly grudge and they don't need it? And actually, you think their grudge isn't really valid?

So, I think what I would do in this situation is ... I always think about things from a practical point of view; like, what is it actually going to achieve? What's it gonna achieve if someone has a passionately-held grudge and I say, 'You know what? I don't think you should have that grudge. I don't think that's grudge-worthy. I think you're wrong to have been offended by that incident and therefore I don't think you should be any more and I think you should cancel out that grudge because I disagree with it.' Chances are that's not going to have any effect.

No one – even me – you know, someone who actually loves grudges and thinks they're really useful and good for me ... I don't pluck grudges out of thin air. I don't, like, manufacture occasions to have them. I only form grudges when I see that those grudges are gonna be there, and then I make a, you know, a conscious thing. So, if someone's got a grudge and you don't think it's grudge-worthy, well, first of all, you might be wrong. Second of all, these things are subjective and they're not gonna be able to get rid of their grudge just because you don't – just because you, in their situation, wouldn't have that grudge.

So, I think if you're going to try and tell someone that you think their grudge isn't grudge-worthy, you have to approach it really carefully. You have to find a way to kind of ask them about it so that maybe, if there's a potential for them to realise that it's not grudge-worthy, then they can arrive at that for themselves. So, I might say something like, 'So, what is it about that situation that you think is grudge-worthy? You know, is it this that you think they've done wrong or is it that?' So, try and just discuss it more generally, and hopefully if it isn't grudge-worthy, then they will come to realise that. But since these things are so subjective, I don't think you can achieve much by saying, 'Your grudge isn't grudge-worthy; I'd abandon it.'

Now, it's a very different situation if someone asks you. I often ask people. If I form a new grudge or am considering making a new grudge, I actually like to check in with some people I trust and say, 'This is what happened. Is it grudge-

worthy or is it not grudge-worthy?' If someone directly asks you then it's absolutely fine to give your opinion, as long as you don't make them feel that they've done something wrong. But, you know, we can all have silly grudges. So, as long as you say it in a kind of, 'Well, I don't personally think that sounds all that grudge-worthy,' rather than, 'No, it's not grudge-worthy, you idiot. Why have you got a grudge about that?' ... As long as you say it with discernment, then it's fine if you're answering a direct question.

As well as questions on the subject of grudges, many, many people sent me while I was researching and writing my book ... they sent me their own personal grudge stories, which ranged from the devastating and the serious to the supposedly minor. But as always with minor incidents, you know, the fact that they're officially minor doesn't mean they can't stick in your mind and be a lasting grudge-story.

So, I'm gonna finish this podcast episode by reading a few of these that didn't make it into the book. Initially, I tried to put all of them in the book and I couldn't, basically, because the book would have been way too long, because you all sent me so many grudge stories, which was amazing and made me feel that absolutely the world does need some work and a book about grudges and a podcast about grudges, but they couldn't all fit in. So, let's read a few of them now.

Somebody says, *I met someone for coffee, who told me I was fatter than expected.* [Laughs] All of these are from different people unless I say differently, or at least might be from different people. I've just got them in a long list here. *My mother in law bought me tights one Christmas.* [Laughs] That's really funny. In the Festive Grudges episode, which is coming up at the end of this season one of this podcast, we're gonna talk about festive grudges which definitely includes people getting you grudge-worthy presents for Christmas.

Okay, let's find another one. Here's one. *When we were ten my brother used my favourite Superman mug without asking. The mug was fine and it didn't get chipped but I was so cross, and now whenever he comes round I hide all my best mugs. He doesn't know!* That's amazing. So, this happened when the writer was ten. It says, 'When we were ten, my brother,' so maybe they were twins. That's amazing because presumably the writer is a grown up now and still hiding the best mugs when the brother comes round. So, you know, that was clearly a boundary violation grudge – some of you might remember from the 'different grudge types' podcast episode; the different categories, common

and rare – the boundary violation grudge is a key category of grudge that crops up. And someone taking something of yours without asking is definitely a boundary violation grudge.

Okay. Let's find another one. *At my wedding my mother in law said the guests 'weren't very easy to mix with.'* [Laughs] And another one. *My mum wouldn't buy me the electric blue satin jeans I wanted when I was little. She said they didn't do them in child sizes and she would get me some when I was a grown up. Sometime in the 90s I saw some in Miss Selfridge and asked her to send me the money and she refused.* [Laughs] That's quite funny. I slightly identify with the mother in that, though, because I often ... you know, my kids often ask me for something and I go, 'Yeah, not now, later,' and I slightly rely on the fact that by 'later', they won't want it any more or will have completely forgotten about it.

Here's another one. *My grudge is against someone I work with. One day, I found that I wouldn't be able to get out of the office in time to pick up my son from school. 'Don't worry', said my colleague. 'I'll pick him up.'* And she never did. *I still talk to the colleague but only when I have to.* Yeah, that's really weird. Why would you promise to pick up someone's kid and then not do it? That's really, really strange. [Tuts]

Okay. *I have a grudge against Serbia. In 2007, they beat Ukraine in the Eurovision Song Contest. Serbia won with a ballad, but everyone knows that drag and flashy costumes represent the true spirit of Eurovision. So now I can't say 'Serbia' without hissing.* [Laughs] Right, so that's a grudge about somebody who thinks ballads shouldn't really win the Eurovision Song Contest because they don't really enter into the spirit of flashy costumes and over the top productions. Interesting. I mean, one of the most interesting things about writing a book about grudges and asking the world to send in their grudges is that you realise ... you know, sometimes I'll read a grudge that someone sent in and I'll think, 'Yep. I would hold that grudge too. Definitely.' And other times, I'd think, 'Yeah, I personally wouldn't hold that particular grudge, but, you know ...' so, it's just interesting how people are so different.

Okay. Let's finish with ... Oh, this is a good one to finish with. This is a grudge that I would probably hold if this had happened to me. *One of my sister in laws was offered my sugar bowl for her tea. It had some lumps in it. She pointedly poked at them and looked directly at me as she did it.* [Laughs] I love that one. So, that is a grudge about a non-verbal act of aggression. If you poke at lumps in a sugar-bowl, while looking at the owner of said sugar-bowl, it could be

taken and clearly has been taken by that particular writer as somebody saying, 'Why the hell have you got lumps in your sugar? Why can't you present me, an honoured guest, with lump-free sugar?'

And actually, I can remember a situation like that that happened to me that I do have a grudge about. So, I am the opposite of a domestic goddess. I really am. I mean, my house ... I'm actually very tidy because I'm a tidiness obsessive, but I don't, for example, have matching salt and pepper pots that I put on the dining table when guests come.

You know, I don't actually have salt in anything, so salt isn't something that's usually on my table if it's just the family. But if guests come and somebody asks for salt, then the only thing I can give them the salt in is the thing that I've bought the salt in from the shop, which is just like one of those big tall cylindrical dispensers. You know, it's just a sort of, and it says, you know, 'Saxa Salt' or whatever on it, which, you know, is fine. The salt comes out of it. It's not, in my view, an offensive thing to put on the table. But we had some friends for dinner once and when I brought the salt and the pepper that came in, you know, whatever I bought the pepper in, and they weren't matching ... so as I put them down on the table for the chap who asked for them, I made some kind of joke, you know, 'Sorry, no matching salt and pepper pots here, it's all a bit casual,' and I expected a reaction along the lines of, 'Ha ha! No problem, don't worry about it,' which is what I think 9 out of 10 people would have said. And this bloke just sort of looked up at me as though I were slightly uncivilised, and said, 'You know, it's not hard to find salt and pepper pots. You know, they're readily available in shops.'

[Laughs] And I was just like, 'Okay, so you really mind that I've given you the salt and pepper in these non-matching containers,' which I just thought was fascinating. And I thought, 'Well, why does he mind? Does he think it's a ...' I think the only thing I could come up with is that he somehow felt it was a reflection on him, and a statement about what I thought about his importance. He is somebody who ... I think, actually, he's chronically insecure and so he bangs on about how important he is all the time. It's one of his regular topics of conversation. And I think he maybe feared that I did have amazing crystal-cut-glass salt and pepper pots that I only brought out for people more important than him.

Which isn't true at all. Whoever comes to my house, they get given salt in exactly the same big white plastic thingy that he got given salt in. So, anyway, that's why I can so identify with that sugar-bowl grudge.

Okay, so, keep them coming. Please do send grudge stories and questions about grudges and your own theories about grudges. Send them all in ... send them all in to sophie@sophiehannah.com and I will see you next time.

That's all for this week. Thanks for listening. Please write a review if you'd like to share your thoughts. I won't hold a grudge if you don't because that would be an invalid grudge.

If you have a grudge which you'd like me to analyse in the next season of this podcast, please email me – I'm sophie@sophiehannah.com – or tweet me at [@grudgesaregreat](https://twitter.com/grudgesaregreat). Remember, just because I'm currently the only person attempting to be a grudge guru, that doesn't mean I've thought of everything. I'd love to hear your ideas.

If you want to read all of my grudge-related wisdom, as well as my personal top ten grudge stories, all of that is in my book, *How to Hold a Grudge: From Resentment to Contentment – The Power of Grudges to Transform Your Life*.

Thanks again for listening. I'll talk to you next week.