

## National Forgiveness Day to focus on mental health

By Michaela Steakley, Alligator Contributing Writer [Oct 16, 2015](#)

Rachel Hofer always wanted to understand mental illness.

It came from a love for her community and concern for mental health awareness, a desire that pushed her to become a counselor and form Loving Therapy and Life Coaching, a Gainesville nonprofit mental health counseling service, in 2013.

"I've always been a really deep thinker," she said. "My friends tell me that I'm very self-reflective and I always have been."

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Now, Hofer, 32, is pushing for statewide recognition of National F disabilities and people who have been bullied can address and forgi

The purpose of the day is to celebrate the power and importance of

"It doesn't mean that you pretend that something negative didn't happen to you, and it doesn't mean you weren't wronged," Hofer said. "The focus is really on self-forgiveness here."

Fourteen other states have a proclaimed National Forgiveness Day, and Hofer said she wants Florida to be the next to join them.

Hofer's celebration will involve an event at Market Street Pub and Cabaret downtown, located at 112 SW First Ave., from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. Saturday. There will be local organizations present to support the cause, performances by a comedian and S-Connection Aerial Arts and an open microphone available to anyone who wants to perform songs, music or poetry.

"National Forgiveness Day is a big thing that can help people who have been through a lot in their lives," said Daphnee Paul, who graduated from UF last May with a degree in family, youth and community sciences.

Paul, 24, a volunteer with Loving Therapy, said she was bullied as a child and even attacked by a group of boys. She believes people hurt themselves when they bottle up their feelings instead of forgiving those who have hurt them.

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"They're only hurting themselves by keeping it inside," she said. "It's good to talk to a counselor and let it out."

Chris Thomas, 52, the president of Loving Therapy, said Hofer was the first person he met who actually wanted to be on the ground, working to find alternative methods for treating mental illness.

"When I met her," he said, "I thought, whoa, she's passionate about this."

The goal is to make National Forgiveness Day a national — and, eventually, global — initiative.

On National Forgiveness Day, Hofer said, the focus is on celebrating the beauty of life and what you have, instead of focusing on what you don't have or how you have been hurt.

"It's just a day to celebrate forgiveness," Hofer said, "the power of forgiveness."

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