

# THE ESSENTIALS OF APOLOGIZING

a sampling from the book *Communicate to Connect* based on tips from the daily Relationship Tips



## INSIDE

- 2 Hows Of Apologizing
- 2 After You've Apologized
- 2 Don't Ruin An Apology With An Excuse
- 3 How To Request Forgiveness
- 4 How Not To Apologize
- 5 The First One To Apologize Is The Stronger One
- 6 Components Of A Good Apology
- 7 Apology Languages
- 8 Why Some People Find It Hard To Apologize



**Saying "I'm sorry" isn't just about the words; it's about healing and moving forward.** When you apologize, you show that you recognize your mistakes, take responsibility, and care enough to fix them. For yourself, this helps you grow and feel better, fostering personal integrity and inner peace. It's a sign of emotional maturity, demonstrating that you can reflect on your actions and their impact. This self-awareness not only helps you avoid repeating the same mistakes but also contributes to a healthier self-image and greater self-respect.

For your relationships, a sincere apology can mend hurt and misunderstandings. It shows the other person that you respect them and are committed to making things right. Apologizing strengthens trust and brings you closer together, making your connections stronger and more meaningful. A heartfelt apology can diffuse tension and open the door to honest communication, allowing both parties to express their feelings and move forward with a deeper understanding. By acknowledging and addressing the hurt you've caused, you build a foundation of trust and respect, essential elements for any healthy relationship.

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## HOWS OF APOLOGIZING

**First, ask how you hurt them and show concern.**

Don't offer excuses or defenses. Instead, understand how much pain you caused by looking at it subjectively – how it felt for the other person.

**The next step after listening is to repeat what you heard – in your own words – without making any excuses.** Just express that you respect and care about how much pain you caused. At that point, you could use the word “sorry” or “apologize”, and it will be far more effective.

**Lastly, state what you will try to do differently in the future,** so that this doesn't happen again.☒

## AFTER YOU'VE APOLOGIZED

- Let them respond as they feel.
- Allow them to process.
- Allow them to remain upset.
- This most definitely is not the time to tell them how to feel.
- Accept that your apology may not be accepted right away.

The person who was offended might have little faith in the apology. Most people aren't just looking for an apology; they want to feel understood and respected. And they may want real changes. Apologies are truly effective only when they convey genuine regret, making the hurt person feel that you respect and understand the pain you caused.

## DON'T RUIN AN APOLOGY WITH AN EXCUSE.

A heartfelt apology includes REMORSE. Remorse comes from true empathy for the pain the other person is feeling because of your actions.

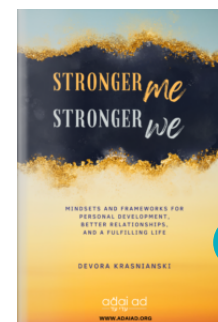
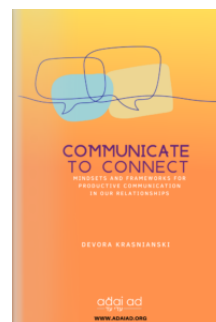
Remorse is different from feeling regret. Regret has to do with wishing you hadn't taken a particular action or said something. You may regret an action because it hurt someone else, but you may also regret it because it hurt you, it cost you something emotionally or financially, or led to a punishment or undesirable result. Remorse is only about the other person.

After you've said your apology, just let it be. Don't backtrack, don't add caveats or excuses, don't add conditions. This is not about you and your ego, this apology is about the other person.

### What not to say:

- “Yes I was wrong but you have to admit I'm not the only one who was wrong here.”
- “Yes I was wrong but in general you have to admit my point still stands.”
- “Yes I was wrong but it was wrong of you to make a big deal out of it.”

Such statements can turn the apology into a blame game and detract from your acknowledgment of your own actions.



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## HOW TO REQUEST FORGIVENESS

Asking for forgiveness places control in the other person's hands, since they don't have to forgive you just because you've apologized.

Note: There is a difference between asking for forgiveness and demanding forgiveness.

### Words you might use:

- "I care about you a lot. Will you please forgive me?"
- "I know it might take you a while, but I just hope you'll be able to forgive me."
- "I know that you might not be ready to forgive me, and I understand how that feels. I simply wanted to say how sorry I am. Take the time you need, I do hope you will forgive me."
- "You didn't deserve that. It was very wrong of me, and I hope you will forgive me."
- "I didn't intend to hurt you but I have. I realize that now, and I see that my actions were wrong ... I want to ask you if you will please forgive me."

### What not to say:

- "Let's forget this ever happened."
- "Let's move forward from here." The one who wronged has no right to say that, you can't rush the forgiveness process. These words are reserved for the one who was wronged to say when he is ready.
- "When are you going to get over this?"
- "Let's not look at the past. Let's just look forward."

## YOU HAVE TO MEAN IT.

### It must be genuine.

An insincere apology is worse than no apology at all.

Your words and tone will reflect your true intention. Are you really sorry for what you did that negatively impacted the other, or are you more concerned about your own ego. (Are you sorry, or sorry that you got caught?)

## HOW NOT TO APOLOGIZE

### "SORRY BUT"

"I'm sorry, but there's a lot going on in my life" and "I'm sorry, but was exhausted" diffuse responsibility. They're excuses. Similarly, "That's not who I am" announces that you were possessed by some sort of demon. If you said it, it is indeed who you are. It's up to you to face that unpleasant part of yourself and work to change it.

### "OBVIOUSLY"

"I obviously didn't mean to hurt you." The word "obviously" is not a humble word. If you obviously didn't mean the horrible thing you said, why did you say it? And if something really is obvious—if you obviously didn't intend to lose the tickets to the event, why point it out now in the apology?

### "MISCONSTRUED"

"You misconstrued my noble intentions; that is not at all what I meant." The word "misconstrued" puts the onus on the other for failing to see your real intentions. When using the word "misconstrued", the speaker is trying to say that they are not the one at fault. In a good apology, you do not present yourself as the aggrieved one.

### "SORRY IF..."

Don't be "sorry if" anyone was hurt by your words or actions. Be sorry *that* you were hurtful. Own it. The "if" adds a shadow of doubt, as if you are trying to portray that maybe you didn't say or do anything nasty after all! "If" is cowardly; "that" takes responsibility.

Similarly, "it distresses me that you're upset" is weaselly: You're implying that their reaction has caused you grief. A good apology is not about you.

### "I AM SORRY THAT YOU FEEL THAT WAY"

This statement shifts the focus away from your actions and onto the other person's emotions. It can be interpreted as dismissive or deflective because it doesn't directly address what you did to cause those feelings. It may imply that the problem lies with the other person's perception rather than with your behavior.

### "I AM SORRY IF YOU FEEL THAT WAY"

This phrase suggests uncertainty about the validity of the other person's feelings altogether, which can be perceived as evasive or non-committal. It fails to acknowledge your responsibility for causing hurt or upset, and can come across as minimizing the impact of your actions on the other person's experience and emotions.

## HOW NOT TO APOLOGIZE

"I DON'T KNOW WHAT I AM APOLOGIZING FOR, BUT I'M SORRY."

"I guess I owe you an apology." This kind of statement indicates a lack of understanding or acknowledgment of the specific actions or words that caused harm. It can make the apology seem reluctant, insincere and superficial as if you're only saying sorry to appease the other person without truly recognizing the impact of your behavior.

"I DIDN'T MEAN TO..."

While intentions are important, emphasizing them can downplay the actual impact of your actions. The focus should be on the harm caused, not your intent.

"YOU KNOW HOW I AM"

This excuse attempts to justify your behavior based on your personality or habits, which doesn't address the actual issue or take responsibility for your actions.

"APOLOGIES  
AREN'T  
MEANT TO  
CHANGE THE  
PAST, THEY  
ARE MEANT  
TO CHANGE  
THE FUTURE."

– Kevin Hancock

## THE FIRST ONE TO APOLOGIZE IS THE STRONGER ONE.

In any relationship, there will be spats and thus occasions for apologizing. It just makes sense to apologize and continue with your loving relationship. But sometimes that seems very hard.

Here are some things to consider as you wait for the other one to apologize.

- The one who apologizes first is the stronger and braver one.
- When you start with the apologies, it helps the other apologize too. You've set the tone for safety, humility, and honesty in the relationship.
- The longer you hold onto the hurt, sadness, or anger, the more hurt, sad, or angry you become, and things escalate from there. Just end that. Apologize.
- Your relationship becomes stronger when you are humble and vulnerable enough to admit your part in the conflict.

## COMPONENTS OF A GOOD APOLOGY

### 1 Take responsibility for your actions/ words. And admit it in your apology.

Own up to what you did. You have to take responsibility for your action. Even if that makes you uncomfortable.

Briefly, specifically and factually recount the action you're apologizing for. You've done something wrong. Say what it is.

Think about it in first-person. And then say it in first-person. And in active voice (not passive). "I am sorry that I left you waiting for 15 minutes." Not "I'm sorry that you were waiting for 15 minutes."

### 2 Acknowledge that you wronged the other, and how that impacted the other.

Then show that you acknowledge how whatever you did, or didn't do, has impacted the other person. Validate the other person's feelings of hurt or anger. Show them that you care about how they feel. "I recognize that my coming late inconvenienced you and the family."

You might add an explanation, but realize that it isn't an excuse; don't try to defend yourself. "I was late because I was studying for a final last night and just couldn't wake up in the morning, but still that's no excuse."

### 3 Resolve not to do it again.

Determine never to repeat the action. Learn a better way to handle whatever it was that preceded your offensive action/words.

And say it aloud to the other. Telling the other your resolve for the future is more than just part of the apology; it's also something of a self-fulfilling prophecy.

- The more specific the better.
- Stated in positive terms – what you will do differently - rather than what you won't do. "I will be more careful..." rather than "I will not be so careless..."

### 4 Apologies are for the other person.

Asking for forgiveness places control in the other person's hands. Every apology should end with a request for forgiveness. Asking for forgiveness places control in the other person's hands, since they don't have to forgive you just because you've apologized.

You might have to apologize and ask for forgiveness again.



# THE ESSENTIALS OF APOLOGIZING

## APOLOGY LANGUAGES

"Apology Languages" is similar to "Love Languages" in that just as everyone has their own unique ways of showing and wanting love, the same applies to apologies. People have their preferences for how they like to apologize and receive apologies. Understanding these differences is key to making apologies that truly resonate with the other person, making them feel valued and respected. It's about transforming a simple apology into a meaningful gesture that can heal relationships and strengthen bonds between people.

While different people might resonate more with one type of apology language, combining several elements can make your apology even more effective. For instance, you might express regret, take responsibility, and offer to make restitution all in one apology. This comprehensive approach ensures that your apology is heartfelt and addresses the needs of the person you have hurt, increasing the likelihood of genuine reconciliation.

### EXPRESSING REGRET

Expressing regret is a fundamental component of apology language. This involves clearly stating that you are sorry for what you did and acknowledging the hurt it caused. It's about saying, "I am sorry for my actions, and I understand they caused you pain." This approach focuses on expressing empathy and validating the other person's feelings, which can be incredibly healing.

### ACCEPTING RESPONSIBILITY

Taking responsibility is crucial in an apology. This means owning up to your mistakes without excuses or shifting blame. Statements like "I was wrong" or "It was my fault" show that you are acknowledging your role in the issue. Accepting responsibility demonstrates maturity and a genuine desire to make amends, which can help rebuild trust.

### MAKING RESTITUTION

Making restitution is about making things right. This might involve offering to compensate for the damage or taking specific actions to correct the wrong. Saying "What can I do to make this right?" shows a willingness to go beyond words and take tangible steps to repair the relationship. It's a way to show that you value the relationship and are committed to making amends.

### GENUINELY REPENTING

Genuine repentance means expressing a desire to change your behavior in the future. It's not just about saying you're sorry but also about committing to not repeating the mistake. Phrases like "I will try to do better" or "I will make sure this doesn't happen again" convey that you have learned from the experience and are committed to improving.

### REQUESTING FORGIVENESS

Requesting forgiveness is the final step in many effective apologies. This involves asking the other person if they can find it in their heart to forgive you. Saying "Will you forgive me?" shows vulnerability and humility. It acknowledges that forgiveness is a process and that the offended party has the right to take their time. This step can be crucial in restoring and strengthening the relationship.

## WHY SOME PEOPLE FIND IT HARD TO APOLOGIZE

If you find apologizing challenging, receive feedback that your apologies missed their mark, or feel resistance to the ideas presented in this booklet, taking time to reflect on your thoughts and feelings about apologizing can be valuable. Consider if any of the following points resonate with you. Understanding the underlying reasons behind your attitude toward apologizing is an important step toward adopting healthier approaches to addressing mistakes and conflicts.

Some people find it difficult to apologize for various psychological, emotional, and social reasons. Here are a few key factors:

**Fear of Vulnerability:** Apologizing requires admitting fault and showing vulnerability, which can be uncomfortable and anxiety-inducing for some people.

**Pride and Ego:** A strong sense of pride or ego can make it hard for someone to admit they were wrong. They may perceive an apology as a blow to their self-esteem or status.

**Fear of Rejection or Conflict:** Some people fear that apologizing might lead to further rejection, anger, or conflict rather than resolution. This fear can prevent them from taking the first step.

**Lack of Empathy:** Difficulty in understanding or empathizing with others' feelings can make it challenging for some to recognize the need to apologize.

**Perfectionism:** Individuals with perfectionist tendencies may struggle to acknowledge their mistakes, as doing so conflicts with their self-image of being flawless. They may also become defensive or defective.

**Fear of Change:** Some individuals fear that apologizing implies they must make changes or admit to needing improvement, which can be daunting.

**Lack of Skills:** Not everyone has learned how to apologize effectively. Without the right communication skills, it can be daunting to know how to express regret properly.

**Perceived Power Dynamics:** In relationships where there is an imbalance of power, the person in the dominant position might resist apologizing to maintain control or authority.

**Past Negative Experiences:** If someone has had negative experiences with apologies in the past, such as their apologies being rejected or used against them, they might be hesitant to apologize again.

**Fear of Appearing Weak:** In some cultures or families, apologies may be viewed as a sign of weakness or failure, leading individuals to avoid apologizing altogether.