

Anatomy of an Apology

Apologies can be tricky. Sometimes a simple “I’m sorry” is enough. In other instances, you may need to dig deeper to make up for careless words, thoughtless actions, or an error in judgment.



The next time you need to apologize, keep these steps in mind:

- 1. Clearly state your reason for apologizing.**
 - ▶ Say “I am sorry” or “I apologize.”
 - ▶ Use “I” statements, such as, “I didn’t call to say I would be late.”
 - ▶ Don’t use euphemisms like “the incident” or “what happened.”
- 2. Take responsibility.**
 - ▶ Own your behavior. For example: “I should not have lied to you. That was wrong.”
 - ▶ Keep the focus on your behavior, not the other person’s reaction.
- 3. If the other person chooses to tell you how you made them feel, listen.** Common reactions include feeling:
 - ▶ Silenced or ignored
 - ▶ Marginalized or invalidated
 - ▶ Attacked
- 4. Explain that you are aware of the impact of your behavior.** For example: “I understand that what I did was hurtful.” Outline steps that you can take to avoid repeating the action in the future.
- 5. Ask:**
 - ▶ How the other person is feeling now.
 - ▶ What other steps you could take to strengthen the relationship.
- 6. Don’t apologize unless you mean it.** An insincere apology will likely make things worse.

Other things to keep in mind:

- ▶ The other person is not obligated to accept your apology. Respect that they may decide not to do so or set limits on your relationship moving forward.
- ▶ Apologizing is not just about you being wrong and the other person being right. Sometimes, it demonstrates that you value the relationship more than your own ego.

For more suggestions on how to resolve conflict, either at work or at home, contact LifeMatters. Help is available 24/7/365.

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