

How to Apologize

Apologizing means expressing regret for something you did. A sincere apology involves reflecting on your actions, taking responsibility for them, and making changes to improve things in the future. Giving an apology can help repair a damaged relationship while showing care and respect for the other person.

Reflect on your Actions

Think about how your actions contributed to a problem, even if they were not the sole cause.

Even if someone else also contributed to the problem, what was *my* role?

Try taking the other person's perspective. How do my actions look from their side?

As a result of my actions, how might the other person feel?

Take Responsibility

Say "I'm sorry" (or some version of this phrase) and show regret for your actions. It's important to speak clearly and sincerely. In most cases, it helps to identify the actions you are apologizing for.

Example: "I'm sorry for the language I used during our argument. It was disrespectful, and it was wrong."

I'm sorry for...

It was wrong of me to...

I apologize for...

I feel terrible. I shouldn't have...

I take responsibility for...

This was my fault. I should have...



Never make excuses or try to justify your behavior (e.g. "I'm sorry, but I was tired!").

Listen and Improve

Give the other person a chance to respond without interruption. Forgiveness may take time and is not guaranteed. Be prepared to discuss changes you will make to avoid repeating the problem.

Myths vs. Reality

Myth: Love means never having to say you're sorry.

Reality: Apologies can be particularly important when you love someone. An apology communicates you care about the other person and want them to feel better.

Myth: Apologizing is as simple as saying "I'm sorry."

Reality: Merely saying the words "I'm sorry" is not a complete apology. An apology requires remorse, an attempt to right the wrong, and taking steps to make sure the problem is not repeated.

Myth: Apologizing will make me look weak.

Reality: An apology shows you are secure enough to admit when you've done something wrong. It also shows you have respect for yourself and the other person.

Soft Startups

communication skill

When bringing up a problem to your partner, the first three minutes are crucial. A **soft startup** sets a positive tone and helps resolve conflict. By starting a conversation calmly and respectfully, you and your partner are more likely to focus on the *problem*, rather than who's to blame.

Save the conversation for a calm moment.

- Wait for a time when you and your partner are alone, without distractions or interruptions.
- Make sure you and your partner are relaxed, and not tired, hungry, or stressed.

Use gentle body language and tone of voice.

- Take an attitude of teamwork and problem-solving, rather than arguing or blaming.
- Speak calmly, without raising your voice.
- Avoid hurtful body language, such as eye rolling, scowling, or mocking.

Use "I" statements to express how you feel.

- Focus on how a problem is affecting you, rather than assigning blame.
- Say: "I feel [emotion] when [situation]."

Example

Without "I" statement: "You're so closed off. We need to talk more."

With "I" statement: "I feel *lonely* when *we don't talk*."

Describe the problem clearly.

- Discuss only one problem at a time.
- Be specific. Broad complaints like "the house is a mess" may be misunderstood.

Be respectful.

- Make a polite request, rather than a demand.
- Thank your partner for listening and addressing a problem.

Example

"Could you please..."

"Thank you for..."

"I would appreciate if..."

Active Listening

Communication Skill



Active Listening: Treating listening as an active process, rather than a passive one. This means participating in conversation, rather than acting as an audience. Active listeners show they are listening, encourage sharing, and strive to understand the speaker.

Show You're Listening

Put away distractions. Watching TV, using your phone, or doing other things while listening sends the message that the speaker's words are not important. Putting away distractions allows you to focus on the conversation and help the speaker feel heard.

Use verbal and nonverbal communication. Body language and short verbal cues that match the speaker's affect (e.g. responding excitedly if the speaker is excited) show interest and empathy.

Verbal: "mm-hmm" / "uh-huh" "that's interesting" "that makes sense" "I understand"
Nonverbal: nodding in agreement reacting to emotional content (e.g. smiling) eye contact

Encourage Sharing

Ask open-ended questions. These are questions that encourage elaboration, rather than "yes" or "no" responses. Open-ended questions tell the speaker you are listening, and you want to learn more.

"What is it like to ___?" "How did you feel when ___?" "Can you tell me more about ___?"
"How do you ___?" "What do you like about ___?" "What are your thoughts about ___?"

Use reflections. In your own words, summarize the speaker's most important points. Be sure to include emotional content, even if it was only communicated through tone or body language.

Speaker: *I've been having a hard time at work. There's way too much to do and I can't keep up. My boss is frustrated that everything isn't done, but I can't help it.*

Listener: *It sounds like you're doing your best to keep up, but there's too much work. That sounds stressful!*

Strive to Understand

Be present. Listening means paying attention to body language, tone, and verbal content. Focus your attention on listening, instead of other mental distractions, such as what you want to say next. When possible, save sensitive conversations for a quiet time with few distractions.

Listen with an open mind. Your job is to understand the speaker's point of view, even if you don't agree. Avoid forming opinions and making judgments until you fully understand their perspective.

Assertive Communication



Assertive Communication: A communication style in which a person stands up for their own needs and wants, while also taking into consideration the needs and wants of others, without behaving passively or aggressively.

Traits of Assertive Communicators

- Clearly state needs and wants
- Eye contact
- Listens to others without interruption
- Appropriate speaking volume
- Steady tone of voice
- Confident body language

Assertiveness Tips

Respect yourself. Your needs, wants, and rights are as important as anyone else's. It's fine to express what you want, so long as you are respectful toward the rights of others.

Express your thoughts and feelings calmly. Giving the silent treatment, yelling, threatening, and shaming are all great examples of what not to do. Take responsibility for your emotions, and express them in a calm and factual manner. Try starting sentences with "I feel...".

Plan what you're going to say. Know your wants and needs, and how you can express them, before entering a conversation. Come up with specific sentences and words you can use.

Say "no" when you need to. You can't make everyone happy all the time. When you need to say "no", do so clearly, without lying about the reasons. Offer to help find another solution.

Examples of Assertive Communication

"I've been feeling frustrated about doing most of the chores around the house. I understand that you're busy, but I need help. How can we make this work?"

The speaker takes responsibility for their feelings without blaming, and clearly describes their needs.

"I won't be able to take you to the airport on Friday. I've had a long week, and I want to rest."

The speaker respects their own needs and wants by clearly saying "no".

"I'm having a hard time sleeping when your music is on. What if you use headphones, or I can help you move the speakers to another room?"

The speaker describes their needs, while also considering the needs and wants of the other person.

Assertive Communication

Practice

Tip: Before responding, consider what your wants and needs might be in each situation.

Your Partner: "I know you have plans for the weekend, but I really need you to watch the kids. I have a friend coming to town, and we made plans."

Assertive Response:

Situation: You've just received your food at a restaurant, and it was prepared incorrectly. Your sandwich seems to have extra mayo, instead of no mayo.

Assertive Statement:

Your Friend: "Hey, can I borrow some money? I want to buy these shoes, but I left my wallet at home. I'll pay you back soon, I swear. It won't be like last time."

Assertive Response:

Situation: Your neighbor is adding an expansion to their house, and the crew starts working, very loudly, at 5 AM. It has woken you up every day for a week.

Assertive Statement: