

Conflict Resolution

Making apologies to others is sometimes one of the hardest things we do in our relationships. Honestly, most of us are not good at it. One reason is because apologizing causes us to feel vulnerable. We are afraid to admit we are wrong because doing so might make us look bad or because we are afraid that by being completely honest, we will be hurt again. A second reason apologizing is difficult is because most of us have never been taught how to properly ask for and receive forgiveness. Usually it goes something like this: the offending party says "I'm sorry" and the offended says "That's OK". In this case, the offending party never really says what they are sorry for. Is he sorry for yelling at you? Sorry for hurting your feelings? Or sorry for being caught? Is the "I'm sorry" intended to actually soothe the offended or to merely keep the offender out of trouble? As for the "It's OK", is it really? Is it really OK that you were yelled at? Lied to? Disregarded? The problem with this approach is that it is ineffective. Because no hearts have been changed, the relationship has not really been restored.

To ask for forgiveness first requires us to put aside our pride and fear of rejection. This can be really difficult. Everyone desires to be right at times and no one ever wants to feel rejected or taken advantage of. Yet succumbing to these feelings will prevent us from truly reconciling with our spouse, our friends, our children or our co-workers. When we find we have wronged someone or treated them unfairly, there are steps we can take to hopefully remedy the situation and make peace.

1. Admit specifically what we have done wrong. "I spoke harshly to you and I am sorry" lets the offended party know that I am aware of exactly what I did that was wrong and that I am willing to take responsibility for it.
2. Admit our own feelings and motivations. "I was jealous when you chose to do something with another friend instead of me and I said things that hurt your feelings. I am sorry". Stating our own weaknesses may cause us to feel very insecure. But in a trusted, loving relationship, that type of humility can often bring a greater degree of closeness.
3. Acknowledge that consequences may occur. "I am sorry I embarrassed you in front of your friends when I spoke harshly to you. If you would like to go to the theater with someone else on Friday night, I understand" shows that you are aware that the other person may need some time to reflect on what happened and allow time for her own feelings to heal.
4. Acknowledge the other person's feelings. "Honey, I am so sorry I ignored you when I was angry. I understand why you felt rejected" affirms your spouse's experience and helps him trust you in the future.
5. Ask forgiveness. This step can be especially challenging but it is crucial for both parties to have the opportunity to heal and live in peace. "My procrastination has put us behind schedule which I can see is frustrating to you. I am sorry, will you please forgive me?" lets your friend know that you understand her position and are in need of forgiveness. Not only is this an

opportunity to be freed from feelings of guilt, it is also a chance for her to let go of any grudge she may hold that would cause further strain on the relationship.

6. Attempt change. Depending on the offense, the final step may be simple. If I fail to keep my promise to wait until after dinner to discuss financial matters, one apology may be enough to remind me to address my concerns at a better time. However, attempting to hold my tongue when I am angry in order not to say something I regret might prove more challenging. If that is the case, I must continue to practice asking forgiveness as well as exercising patience and self-control so that my relationship with my spouse is not damaged.

Because these steps may be unfamiliar to us, they may seem artificial or even awkward for a while. Over time, however, they should become more natural and lead to closer relationships with loved ones.

“Therefore, if you are offering your gift there at the altar and remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.” Matthew 5: 23-24