

How to Offer and Accept an Apology

Building Conflict Resolution Skills in Students – Dr. Bryan Harris | www.bryan-harris.com

Offering and Accepting an apology is important for 5 essential reasons:

1. It allows both parties a chance to understand the real issue at hand. This is the cognitive part of the conversation – an acknowledgement of the *thing* that was done.
2. It allows both parties the chance to demonstrate an understanding of the feelings involved. This is the emotional part of the conversation – an acknowledgement of how the thing made the other person *feel*. It allows the victim the chance to let the feelings/offenses go; a chance to move on because the offender realizes what they did wrong.
3. It provides an opportunity for open communication in order to consider past offenses or experiences that might be influencing the current situation. This opens a dialogue that benefits both the offender and the victim and often reveals that rarely is one person completely at fault and the other person guilty.
4. It allows for both parties to move beyond the immediate issue/problem and allows for the repair or restoration of the relationship.
5. While it may be difficult because of strong emotions, offering and accepting an apology is important because it acknowledges that everyone makes mistakes and that grace and forgiveness is important. After all, we appreciate it when someone else admits fault and seeks forgiveness. Everyone should be humble enough to do the same.

How to Offer an Apology

- I apologize for ...
- It was my fault that _____ happened. I apologize for letting it happen.
- I realize that....
- I realize that _____ was my fault and I am sorry for making you feel _____.
- I am truly sorry that I did this. I want to make things better. Tell me how I can do that.
- I am truly sorry that this happened. Tell me how I can make things better.
- I know that _____ made you feel _____. I am sorry. Will you please forgive me?
- I know that _____ made you feel _____. That was wrong. I'm sorry.
- I promise that....
- This was wrong because...
- _____ was wrong. I'm sorry. Will you please forgive me?
- I feel badly about _____. Will you please forgive me? I'd still like to be friends.
- Because we are friends, I shouldn't have _____. I'm sorry.
- I am sorry for _____. Next time I will _____.
- I did not mean to offend you. I am sorry that it happened.
- I did not realize that _____ would hurt your feelings. I am sorry.
- I realize that _____ was wrong. Next time I will....
- I sincerely apologize for _____. I realize how it impacted you.

Things not to do when **offering** an apology

- Make an excuse (ex. "I was just having a bad day.")
- Exaggerate or blame someone else.
- Take responsibility for something that you truly did not do.
- Don't expect immediate forgiveness (sometimes feelings take some time to recover).
- Look at the ground or face away from the person. While you do not necessarily have to look the other person in the eyes, pay attention to body language. If your body language is closed and angry, the apology will not likely be accepted as genuine.

How to **Accept** an Apology

- I accept your apology. Make sure this does not happen again.
- Because I know you will not do this again, I accept your apology.
- I'll accept your apology because....
- Because you know that _____ was wrong, I accept your apology.
- Because you know that _____ hurt me, I can accept your apology.
- Next time...
- I now understand why/what happened. I can forgive you.
- I understand...
- I forgive you for....
- Thank you for explaining how _____ happened. I accept the apology.
- I appreciate the fact that you apologized. I can accept your apology.
- Before we move on, I have one question.
- Thank you for apologizing.
- Thank you for the apology. You can help make things better by...
- You are right. You shouldn't have done that but I forgive you.
- Thank you for taking the time to explain what happened.

Things not to do when **accepting** an apology

- Unnecessarily repeat the offense (repeat the story) if the offender truly understands the problem. In other words, there is no need to continue to "beat the person up" if they accurately understand what they did wrong.
- Don't use phrases like "It's OK" or "That's alright". Why? Because if the offense was truly a problem, it is not "alright" and it is not "OK". Use phrases like "I accept your apology" or "I forgive you."
- Don't "drag out" the conversation in order to punish the other person. Realize that seeking an apology from someone is difficult for most people. It is humbling, embarrassing, and risky. If someone is genuinely seeking to apologize, keep the conversation brief and direct.
- Don't assume that the other person is horrible, evil, or a "bad" person. The fact is that everyone makes mistakes.