

10 Tips for Giving a Genuine Apology

1. **Don't BUT in...** Avoid the word BUT as it shifts the focus off of you taking responsibility and tends to lead to an excuse, minimization or blame. i.e. "I'm sorry I threw away your important paper, but if you took better care of your things this wouldn't have happened."
2. **Do take full responsibility** – Give some thought to what you contributed to the situation and own it. "I'm so sorry I ran over your bike. I really wish it hadn't happened – I know how precious your bike was to you." The temptation here will be to blame them – your bike shouldn't have been behind my car...but we all know the real truth is your job as a driver is to notice what's around you. So take responsibility and leave the teachable moment for later. "We're really lucky there was a bike at that garage sale, now how are we going to make sure this one doesn't get run over?"
3. **Don't become the martyr** – Adding in self-deprecating comments to your apologies such as, "I'm a terrible person; I'm a bad mommy/wife/friend," is a guilt producing tactic that you may have internalized in your upbringing. In this case you are trying to avoid taking responsibility by attacking your own character and unconsciously (or sometimes consciously) trying to get them to come to your defense. This is hard on your self-worth as well as damaging to the relationship and in the end isn't even taking responsibility for your actions.
4. **Do be sincere** – if you're not really sorry at the moment, either avoid apologizing or be honest with them. "I realize you think I messed up and owe you an apology. You could be right...I'll have to think about it some more first." Or "I don't feel like I have anything to apologize for – your homework is your responsibility even when I forget to remind you to do it." Do not apologize if you do not feel sorry for what you have done. You can say, "I'm sorry you feel this way," or "I'm sorry you think I wronged you," but only when you mean it...avoid giving empty apologies.
5. **Don't promise the impossible.** I'm sorry I was late, it won't happen again – I promise. People can sense when a promise is not possible, and it has a huge negative impact on trust. Even little kids can sense the impracticality when an adult tells them, "Mommy will never, ever leave you – I promise," and know in their subconscious that this is not something their mommy can promise. So avoid these kinds of promises at anytime in your conversations and especially when making an apology.

6. **Do ask how you can make amends** – most apologies would do better with an option to make it up to the other person than a request to forgive...which brings us to #7
7. **Don't demand forgiveness** – An apology is your way of telling another person you did not intend to hurt. It does not require the other person to accept what you say and does not result in automatic forgiveness. If it's forgiveness you need you could add on..."I hope in time you can forgive me...(and even)...I will do my best to earn back your trust."
8. **Do be prepared with options** – Giving some thought to how you make something up to a person and then offering them out as suggestions, typically shows true remorse and makes it easier for the other person to accept your apology. Be sure they are good suggestions and don't put them out until your apology has been given. "I'm so sorry I forgot our anniversary. I really want to make it up to you – do you want to hear some ideas of how I thought I might do that?"

A note of caution: Amends must focus on the needs of the person who feels wronged, so don't offer a massage because you love massages...it must be something of meaning to them.

9. **Don't turn apologies into a weapon** – Sometimes it's tempting to think giving a good apology makes us the bigger person so we get frustrated when they don't respond in kind. Maybe they stay angry or maybe they keep bringing it up (teasing). As a result you might be tempted to strike out – "Look, I said I was sorry – now drop it!" "I apologized to you – what more do you want?" "Why am I the only one who apologizes? You're just as wrong as I was!"

You don't get to decide how long it takes another person to move on, however you can bring it up at a later time in casual conversation, "You know, I've noticed that when I make a mistake and apologize you like to keep bringing it up after – as a joke or reminder. I find that hurtful – like I'm being punished for something I've already apologized for. Is that your intention?"

10. **Do keep it short** – Most genuine apologies can be given in one or two very short sentences: "I'm sorry I was late, next time I'll give myself extra time for trains." "I apologize for forgetting to stop at the store – can we make it through the night without milk?" "I'm sorry I yelled at you and said what I did, I was hurting and struck out at you. Please give me a chance to make it up to you."