
REPAIR & RECONCILIATION

The Apology That Actually Works

Why 'I'm sorry' is not enough and how to apologize in a way that actually heals.

Boundary Agreement Resource Library

Dr. Hines Inc. | boundaryagreement.com

This guide is a coaching resource, not therapy or counseling.

Most Apologies Fail

'I'm sorry you feel that way' is not an apology. 'I'm sorry, but...' is not an apology. 'I already said I was sorry, what more do you want?' is definitely not an apology. Most people have never learned how to apologize in a way that actually reaches the other person.

The 5 Parts of a Real Apology

1. Name what you did.

Be specific. 'I'm sorry for what I said about your mother at dinner' is an apology. 'I'm sorry for whatever I did' is not. If you cannot name it, you have not understood it.

2. Acknowledge the impact.

Not what you intended. What actually happened. 'I know that embarrassed you in front of your family' or 'I know that made you feel like I don't respect you.' This shows you understand.

3. Take responsibility without excuses.

No 'but.' No 'I was stressed.' No 'You did it first.' Own it. 'That was wrong of me. There is no excuse.' Full stop.

4. Express genuine remorse.

'I feel terrible that I hurt you' or 'I hate that I did that to us.' This is not performative guilt. It is honest emotion. Your partner can tell the difference.

5. State what you will do differently.

An apology without changed behavior is manipulation. 'Going forward, I will not bring up your family during arguments. If I do, call me on it.' Commit to change and follow through.

What a Real Apology Sounds Like

"I was wrong to raise my voice at you in front of the kids last night. I know that scared them and embarrassed you. There is no excuse for that, and I am sorry. I am going to work on recognizing when I am escalating and stepping away before it gets to that point. You deserve better than that, and so do they."

EXERCISE: Write Your Apology

Think about something you need to apologize for. Use the 5-part framework.

What I did (be specific):

The impact on my partner:

Taking responsibility (no excuses):

How I feel about what I did:

What I will do differently:

EXERCISE: Receiving an Apology

Not everyone knows how to receive an apology either. Reflect on these.

When my partner apologizes, do I accept it or hold onto it?

Do I bring up forgiven offenses in future arguments?

What does my partner need to see from me when they apologize?

Am I open to believing they can change? Why or why not?

Boundary Agreement Resource Library | Dr. Hines Inc. | boundaryagreement.com
This is a coaching resource, not therapy. Not a substitute for licensed professional help.