

EFFECTIVE APOLOGIES

Much research on what constitutes an *effective* apology and how that is related to forgiveness. Delivering an apology is a fundamental and validating process as it reassures the Receiver that they are not at fault/being *blamed for the Transgressor's actions*. Apologies allow Receivers to regain their *dignity and their sense of self-worth* (White, 2006). Transgressors who apologize *effectively (feel responsible/acknowledge specific harm)* are also less likely to re-offend (Schlenker & Darby, 1981; Choi & Sevenson, 2000).

- Apologies do not always result in greater levels of forgiveness, when Receiver has reason to believe the Transgressor is likely to commit future similar acts based on Transgressor's history, or believes transgression was deliberate (Gold & Weiner, 2000).
- Insincere apologies used strategically to minimize responsibility, control or manipulate (i.e. to try to win or get something) are ineffective and risk further damaging already fragile relationships (Ross, 2014).
- Simple, incomplete apologies (e.g. "I'm sorry") appear to lack sincerity and are deficient in addressing the core elements of an adequate apology. **Sufficient apologies** are more complete/elaborate, and address a **minimum** of: 1. Accepting responsibility, 2. Promising Restraint in the future, (e.g. based on a concrete plan), and 3. Offering restitution (e.g. validating impact on the Receiver/repair) (Reyna, 2014).
- When delivering an effective apology, the apologizer **must avoid** excuses, reasons, justifications, defensive statements and arguments, and instead, focus on the **impact of the transgression**. Apologies need to be about the impact on the other person, *not the apologizer* — *not* about the apologizer's own intentions, thoughts, and feelings, e.g.

"I didn't mean to..."

"I was trying to..."

"If X hadn't happened ... "

"I didn't realize..."

"I had a good reason..."

"It wasn't my fault..."

- The absence of apologies that leaves conflict unresolved can lead to anger/hurt that fester, producing resentment resulting in greater degree of suffering for Receiver (Daicoff, 2013; Ohbuchi, Agarie, & Kameda, 1989). The longer the Transgressor waits to offer an apology, *the more harm is done*, and the less likely it is that apology will result in forgiveness (Choi & Sevenson, 2009).
- With an apology, Receivers can gain ability to deal with negative self-judgments and related emotions they have experienced as a result of the harmful act (Petrucci, 2002). An apology can successfully decrease the aggressive feelings experienced by Victims, and can contribute to a more favorable perception of the Transgressor (Ohbuchi, Agarie, & Kameda, 1989; Ohbuchi & Sato, 1994).
- Process of offering an apology can foster *therapeutic guilt*, allowing Transgressor to tolerate responsibility without undue self-blame, understand that they are inherently a decent person who has committed an act that can be avoided in the future (Daicoff, 2013). (Move away from black & white thought processes that condemn self/others.)
- Effective apology validates Victim's *right* to be angry/hurt and reduces their uncertainty about the offender's motivation behind the incident; Also leads to greater level of forgiveness and reduced degree of vengefulness/resentment towards Offender (Eaton, Struthers, Shomrony & Santelli, 2007; Reyna, 2014). Face-to-face apologies are ideal; when unfeasible, a letter or video or can be a substitute (Smith, 2013).

➤ **Effective Apologies have 5 Distinct Elements:**

1. **Expressing Regret** – Saying, "I am sorry" & also describing *specific acts/impacts* for which Receiver is apologizing/responsible.
2. **Accepting Responsibility** – Admitting, "I was wrong," in some form, describing how this was the case (e.g. describe what was ineffective/harmful/damaged).
3. **Making Restitution** – Committing to "Making it right." Effective apology offers *both emotional and symbolic compensation for the victim*; tends to be perceived as more momentous than even monetary compensation (Lee, 2005; White, 2006). Acknowledgment/recognition of the *specific damage to the relationship* with an explicit, *direct attempt to repair the relationship* (Choi & Sevenson, 2009), to whatever extent possible.
4. **Genuinely Repenting** – Promising, "I will not do that again;" creating/describing specific steps/plan Apologizer will take to stop him/herself from repeating same behavior in similar circumstances to avoid related future damage to the relationship (Choi & Sevenson, 2009).
5. **Requesting Forgiveness** – Asking, "Will you forgive me?" or stating "My hope is that perhaps in time you will be able to forgive me." Critical that the apologizer understands clearly that forgiveness may not be granted immediately or ever, depending on history of similar infractions and Apologizer's established ability/skill at avoiding repeating the transgression. Important to openly acknowledge that time may be needed, and that forgiveness is not demanded/expected. At same time, it's *healing to both* persons for apology to occur, whether or not forgiveness occurs (Lee, 2005; Petrucci, 2002). **Neither forgiveness nor reconciliation is even possible without an effective apology** (Eaton, Struthers, Shomrony & Santelli, 2007; Reyna, 2014; Exline, Deshea, & Holeman, 2007; McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997; Zuccarini, Johnson, Dalgleish, & Makinen, 2013).