

General Recovery - Taking Responsibility

This week it struck me that many of us need tips on making apologies. First, know that “I’m sorry” is not the most important part of an apology. It is more essential that the other person feel heard. Do not confuse apologizing or validating another person’s feelings with establishing blame (which isn’t important in conflict resolution). Acknowledging another human being’s reality does not mean you have to agree with them, nor does it mean that you are at fault. The upset of the other person is enough to tell you that they need to be heard and understood. And, if your offense was one that rocked the foundation of trust in the relationship (like an affair or addiction), know that you may need to hear about the other person’s feelings repeatedly over the course of time before forgiveness occurs. **Pointers for apologizing to an adult:** If you say the words “I’m sorry” be sure they are followed by a description of your specific behavior. Don’t say, “I’m sorry you are hurting.” (that’s taking responsibility for the *other* person’s feelings). Say, “I’m sorry I yelled at you.” Or, “I gave you advice when you didn’t ask for it. That was wrong.” Next, wait to hear about the effects of your behavior on the other person and reflect what they say until they hear that you get it. Just accept what is said like the grown-up you are. Do not throw a pity party or start condemning yourself- that will make the interaction about *you* instead of the other person. **Pointers for apologizing to a child:** Comment only on the facts of the situation. Don’t say, “I’m sorry you feel that way” (this communicates that you did no wrong, but that the child responded with the “wrong” feeling). Say, “I’m sorry that I used such a mean voice when I told you to stop...” Don’t say, “I’m sorry, but you cannot have cotton candy.” Say, “I don’t want you to eat cotton candy because it is not healthy for your teeth or body.” Ask questions of the hurt child until you see that the child feels understood. The child doesn’t need you to change your understanding of the situation; he/she just needs to feel heard.