



MEMBER UPDATE

ReFresh

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This week...

Apology Accepted

While relationships can be great sources of stress relief, **conflict can be the source of considerable stress, which can really take a toll on our well-being.** Therefore, learning the **art of apologizing** effectively may **significantly reduce the negative effects** you experience from conflict and relationship stress. Apologies help to put the conflict behind us, and enable us to move on more easily.

Give it a Go!

In the NPR podcast episode, [*You're Apologizing All Wrong. Here's How To Say Sorry The Right Way*](#), hear from well-known psychologist and author Dr. Harriet Lerner about the value and art of apologizing. This informative and humorous episode explains why a well-delivered and sincere apology is healthy both for you and the person receiving your apology.

According to Dr. Lerner, here are 5 tips to remember when apologizing.

1. **Drop your defenses:** Listen with intent to understand the other person, do not seek out things you disagree with
2. **Be real:** be genuine with sorrow and remorse
3. **No 'ifs' or 'buts':** A sincere apology does not include caveats or qualifiers
4. **Less is more:** Keep it short
5. **Stay focused:** Your attention when apologizing should be on the impact of your words or deeds. The hurt party wants to know that you really get it, that you validate their feelings, and that you care.

A good apology is a beginning, not an end. According to Dr. Lerner, *"An apology creates and opening. When done with attention and care, it can be a conduit for greater understanding and deeper connection."*

Want to learn more?

Relationships are important to our health. Being connected to others boosts our resilience and mental health, and enhances our quality of life (*in fact, I covered this topic in detail in The Learning Brain – [click here!](#)*). However, conflicts within our relationships can be a source of considerable stress and can take a toll on our well-being. Let's take a deeper look at the science behind apologizing.

The Health Benefits of the Apology

A well-delivered and sincere apology is healthy both for you and the person receiving your apology.

An apology is crucial to both mental and physical health. Research shows that receiving an apology has a noticeable and positive physical effect on the body.

Apology Benefits Both the Giver and the Receiver

The negative affects of the remorse and shame we may feel when we've hurt another person can eat away at us until we become emotionally and physically ill. By apologizing and taking responsibility for our actions, we help rid ourselves of low self-esteem, self-reproach and guilt. When we develop the courage to admit we are wrong, and work past our resistance to apologizing, we develop a deep sense of self-respect.

Apologizing helps us remain emotionally connected to our friends and loved ones. Knowing we have wronged someone may cause us to distance ourselves from the person, but once we have apologized, we feel freer to be vulnerable and intimate. Sometimes, apologizing

can cause us to feel humiliated, which can be a deterrent to repeating behaviour that hurts others.

In the *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, researchers from the University of Massachusetts Medical Center tested the influence of apology on cardiovascular reactivity and recovery. In this study, half of the participants received an apology from the experimenter for her/his harassing remarks during a task the participants had to complete. Researchers found that in response to the apology, participants displayed heart rate variability that was of higher frequency, and healthier than those who did not receive an apology.

Remorse is genuine sorrow that we feel in the present moment for pain we have caused in the past. Initially, this sorrow is fuelled by self-blame, shame, and humiliation. Before asking another for forgiveness, we must plant the seeds of self-forgiveness in our own hearts. Remind yourself that mistakes require correction and not condemnation. Recognize that the depth of remorse that you are feeling is a direct reflection of your deep capacity for love, integrity, and caring.

An apology affects the bodily functions of the person receiving it — blood pressure decreases, heart rate slows, and breathing becomes steadier.

- The person that has been harmed feels emotional healing when they are acknowledged by the wrongdoer.
- When we receive an apology, we no longer perceive the wrongdoer as a personal threat.
- Apology helps us to move past our anger and prevents us from being stuck in the past.
- Apology opens the door to forgiveness by allowing us to have empathy for the wrongdoer.

Scientific studies are validating the health-promoting benefits that can result from apologizing. Researchers at the University of British Columbia conducted a study to determine whether recovery from anger could be diffused with apologies. The results showed that “subjects displayed faster blood pressure recovery when they received a genuine apology but recovered more slowly when they received a pseudo-apology or no apology.”

Being adept at apologizing can bring the benefits that come with stronger relationships, reduced conflict, and forgiveness — happiness and stress relief: it's well worth the effort.

The 'Right' Apology

When an apology is done well, the process is deeply healing. A sincere, well-worded apology makes all the difference in repairing— even strengthening— a relationship. Done poorly, however, the apology can damage that same relationship.

According to Dr. Harriet Lerner, a good apology is an opportunity for us to take clear and direct responsibility for our wrongdoing without evading, blaming, making excuses, or dredging up offenses from the past. It brims with accountability, meets the moment, and can transform our relationships.

It is most beneficial and effective when remorse is expressed directly from you to the person you hurt. Sending a proxy will not suffice. Offering an apology in the form of a letter, a poem, or flowers may serve to initiate the healing process, but nothing can take the place of an in-person, heart-to-heart exchange.

When apologizing, do your best to keep it simple, direct, and sincere. Begin by acknowledging the hurt that you have caused, without including any justifications for your hurtful behavior. Don't defend yourself or your actions. Remember that the apology is for the other person. At this point it doesn't matter if the offense was intentional or not, because the result was the same. As Benjamin Franklin wisely cautioned, "Never ruin an apology with an excuse."

Be sure to state your willingness to make any amends necessary. You might ask, "What can I do to make it right between us?" Speak your gratitude for being given this opportunity to apologize, and your desire to be given another chance.

If you found this article interesting, here is a 50 minute, in depth scientific podcast on [The Power of the Apology](#).

Is there anyone out there waiting for you to say you are sorry? Assuming an apology is appropriate, consider reaching out and mending the relationship with the right apology.

Sources

NPR Life Kit | [You're Apologizing All Wrong. Here's How To Say Sorry The Right Way](#)

Psychology Today | [The Power of Apology](#)