

Alpine County Choose Civility Campaign

(An initiative of the Child Abuse Prevention Council and County Superintendent of Schools)



November Focus:

Apologize Earnestly

An apology can be defined as an expression of one's regret, remorse or sorrow for having insulted, failed, injured or wronged another. To apologize earnestly means showing seriousness and sincere intent when saying you're sorry. Apologies are one of the most valuable resources we have in our efforts to build good relationships and sincerity is the cardinal rule of apology. Unfortunately, apologizing is sometimes very hard to do.

Let's look at an example of an apology to examine sincerity and intent. First, let's imagine I'm in line at the grocery store and notice the "quick check, 10 items or less" lane is open. I've got nearly 20 items but I'm in a hurry and jump into that lane. A moment later another person with only a few items stands behind me. I turn and say, "I'm so sorry but I'm running late and I'm in a hurry! Thanks for being patient with me." So, I did apologize. I even sounded sincere when I said I was SO sorry, but what's wrong with my intent? I instantly ruined the sincerity of my apology by adding an excuse. I'm not taking responsibility for my action by excusing it. I think I've been guilty of this more often than I'd like to admit: "I'm sorry I snapped at you, but I'm so tired." I'm sorry I said that, but you shouldn't have said what you did."

Why is apologizing in earnest so hard? I think three things can get in the way of a sincere apology (at least they've gotten in my way!): our pride, embarrassment and anger. For some of us, it's hard to admit we're wrong because, quite honestly, we have a pretty big opinion of ourselves. Other times we're ashamed or uncomfortable about what we did that wronged another so it's hard to face them and apologize. Finally, it can be difficult to calm down when you're still angry with someone. You may feel the situation is more their fault than yours. You may think they should apologize first. Can you find some part to apologize for? That's sometimes all that's needed to defuse the problem. In sum, humility is the key.

Some tips for improving your skills in this area include:

- ✓ Don't use "but" when you say you're sorry. Instead of taking responsibility for your own actions, when you excuse them by saying, "I'm sorry, but..." you've instantly ruined any sincerity you started off with.

- ✓ Take responsibility for what you did or said.
- ✓ Try to apologize in person so you can see each other's expressions. If you need to write your apology, try not to text it or post it on Facebook! Some of us do better writing out our apologies, so use a note card and read it over a few times before sending it. Be sure you've taken responsibility and not excused your actions.
- ✓ Make it right, if possible. ("I'm sorry I ruined dinner by arguing tonight. Can I make dinner tomorrow and let's try again?").
- ✓ Pledge to do better in the future ("I sure was being selfish. I'm going to try harder to think of your feelings next time.").
- ✓ Once you know you've apologized earnestly, let it go. No need to stew over it or stay angry at the other person for not apologizing too.
- ✓ Remember that the person you hurt or wronged might not accept your apology right away. An apology may not instantly erase hurt. It may take time for healing, but an apology is a step in the right direction.
- ✓ Also, remember to be gracious when someone apologizes to you. Offer forgiveness and move forward. Forgiveness feels so good!

Children's Books about Apologizing

Sorry, by Trudy Ludwig is great for ages 5 and up. There's even advice and suggested conversation starters for this story about a little boy, Jack, who learns that the path to forgiveness isn't always the easiest.

Lively Elizabeth: What Happens When You Push, by Mara Bergman is a great book about a little girl who pushes a friend and learns about accountability, apologizing and forgiveness.

Books about Apologizing for Adults

The Five Languages of Apology: How to Experience Healing in all Your Relationships, by Gary D. Chapman and Jennifer Thomas. The authors detail proven techniques for giving and receiving effective apologies.

Forgiveness is a Choice: A Step-by-Step Process for Resolving Anger and Restoring Hope, by Robert D. Enright, Ph.D. is a practical guide based on a psychological study leading readers through a process for forgiveness.