

Coaching children in the healing art of apology

by Lisa McKimm



Have you ever lead your kids up to someone and demanded from your resistant offspring "Now, say sorry!?" If a determined "No!" was the reply - then what comes next? Perhaps something like, "Say sorry right now- or you can go to your room and stay there until you do!!"

As parents, we would like to see our kids apologising for their wrongs - but how do we go about coaching kids in this invaluable skill? Well, more often than not - we use threats and bully them into it. And the end result of this approach is that our children may grow into adults who never apologise, because it feels humiliating!

Think about this. What value is an apology that does not come from the heart. Both the giver and the receiver can tell that it is not authentic, so nobody's being fooled by it. It doesn't clear the conscience of the giver, and it doesn't leave the receiver feeling that justice has been done. Everyone gets cheated of a potentially good outcome. What can we do instead?

First up, instead of demanding an apology, we can gently talk to our children so that they can feel their conscience working. Not through a guilt trip - but by showing empathy for the situation that your child has found him/herself in. Then, coach your child in what might have been a more appropriate way to handle the situation e.g. "You must have felt pretty angry when you found that your sister had opened your new birthday paints and wrecked them? Punching her is against our house rules though. I know you were really mad, - what could you have done instead?"

Talk in a very gentle and friendly way during this conversation. Your understanding will reduce the steam in the situation.

Ultimately your conversation could lead to something like "I really think that what you have just said is perfect for that situation. You're right, you did need to explain how angry you were without hitting. I love the way that you came up with that. What else needs to be done now to put this right?"

If you have to - suggest an apology. Help with the words if they need it. "I'm really sorry for punching you". Coach them not to follow it up with "...but I wouldn't have had to if you just kept your mitts off my stuff!!!"

We should never try justifying our bad behaviour in the middle of an apology. Of course, this is tough for kids to learn because we, as parents, do it all of the time! "I'm sorry I embarrassed you in front of all of your friends.... But I wouldn't have had to if you did what you were asked the first time!"

A very effective ending for an apology is, "Can you forgive me for that?" This way your apology is not just an announcement - it is a two-way conversation. If you only make an announcement - how will you know if the other person is able to forgive you right now? And won't you want to know!?

Awesome athletes get coaching, why shouldn't awesome parents!! Want to be an awesome parent?

If parents want to teach their kids how to make great apologies, they need to focus on role-modelling great ones for their kids to see and hear. It might be a good idea if we parents start activating these techniques - we may then see them being used far more often by our kids!

Coaching in this area and many other areas is available through the Awesome Parents Programme - contact us to find out more.

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