



THE POWER OF APOLOGY – by Marney W. DeFoore, LCSW-S

What three words do you long to hear? Maybe you want to hear the sound of someone saying, “I love you,” or “Please forgive me.” Perhaps you are eager to hear, “I am sorry,” or “I forgive you.”

If I offend you, it is my responsibility to present myself to you in an apologetic manner and to be accountable for and take responsibility for my offense. If you have taken offense from something I have said or done, I may or may not have true culpability. In any case, because of my commitment to the relationship, I may choose to go ahead and apologize anyway - even if I am not at fault. In some cases, I may dismiss the concern as being the problem of the other person. The more intimate the relationship, the more invested I am in making things right.

In any case, when I apologize, I might say, “I want to apologize for my behavior (or words). I did not intend this result and I regret that things have gone the way they have. What can I do to help make this right?” This is both the apology and the offer to make amends. It may suffice at times to simply say, “I am sorry,” and leave it at that. However, I haven’t identified what I’ve done that was offensive.

Offering to make amends to help right a wrong does not necessarily mean I am willing to do what the other person suggests. It does, hopefully, send the message that I am open to hear what the other person has to say about the matter. If the other person is inconsolable, you can always say something like this: “We can talk about this more another time. I want you to know that I am sorry, and that I am committed to work through this with you. I am going to move forward now. I trust you to let me know if you want to discuss this more later.”

Making an apology or offering amends is not easy or comfortable for anyone. It is, however, the responsible thing to do. The key for me comes back to internal dialogue - another topic I’ve written about before. When apologizing outwardly, what I say to myself inwardly has much more impact on me, and what I feel and think. So, tell yourself that this is the right thing to do and go apologize!

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