



## Making and receiving apologies: a dialogical process in 6 steps

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In living together, it happens to all of us that we have made a mistake towards someone else, said something hurtful or crossed a line in some other way. Sometimes a sincere 'sorry' is enough to restore the relationship, but in other cases it is not enough. Then a dialogical process between apology-giver and apology-receiver is required in which these apology-partners go through the following steps:

### **1. Occasion**

First of all, both parties will have to agree on the reason(s) for the apology: what was said or done that damaged the mutual relationship? This may require exploring and interpreting their joint history.

### **2. Responsibility**

It should be made clear that the person who gives an apology also holds himself responsible for the injury. Sometimes both parties have a share in the situation, as in some marriage conflicts, yet in the case of slavery responsibility clearly rests on a single party's shoulders.

### **3. Norms**

It is important that both parties agree on which moral norm(s) has been transgressed. After all, by acknowledging the norm(s) involved it becomes understandable both how the recipient of apologies has been hurt and how such a situation should be avoided by the apology-giver in the future.

### **4. Regret**

Subsequently, it is important that the apology-giver also expresses sincere regret about this transgressive act. After all, with the apology and the expression of regret and remorse, he takes distance from the act, underlining that the event was not representative of who he aims to be. Indeed, it expresses that this action should remain exceptional for himself.

### **5. Reparation**

In some cases, verbal apologies will not be sufficient on their own and the apology-giver is also responsible to repair the damage done. In this way, the excuse-bringer also expresses his intention to prevent a recurrence in the future. Moreover, he shows not wanting to profit anymore from the injustice from the past.

### **6. Acceptance**

Just as making excuses is often a difficult and painful process, it often proves difficult to accept an apology. Nevertheless, there is also a certain responsibility on the apology-recipient to enable the apology-giver to distance himself from his past transgressive behavior and thus contribute to the restoration of the mutual relationship.

### **Complicating factors: groups and historical distance**

It is often argued that apologies are of no use if the event took place in the distant past or if those directly involved are no longer alive. In some cases, however, the organizations or governments are the direct legal successors of organizations that have previously operated harmfully. In addition, everyone is a member of several groups or communities, with which we also have certain rights and responsibilities - for example through our nationality. Sometimes we belong to a group that has previously been guilty of transgressive behavior that has damaged others or, conversely, to a group that has to deal with a long history of disadvantage and discrimination. Depending on the severity of the damage and the benefit that one group has been able to derive from it, members may feel it is necessary to account for it to the other group. After all: a statement such as 'Never Again!' sounds hollow if it does not include a sincere attempt to undo the still noticeable consequences of the past for the other group.

*In short: almost 160 years after the abolition of slavery, there is no good reason to postpone such a dialogical process of making and accepting apologies any longer!*