**Guide to making a compassionate, mindful apology**

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**Adapted from** The Art of the Mindful Apology: Why 'Sorry' is Not Enough

<https://www.gottman.com/blog/the-art-of-the-mindful-apology-why-sorry-is-not-enough/>

Our individual differences predispose us to encountering conflict in our relationships. It’s not a question of *if* but *when*.

It’s what we do to get back on track that counts, rather than sweeping issues under the carpet and allowing grudges to pass without addressing them. And like an iceberg, it is rarely the superficial, day to day activities which are the difficulty – it is our underlying values, beliefs, experiences, old triggers that are activated which need to be addressed.

Apologizing is a three-step process. It’s a process of *compassionate communication* which involves each committed partner. In *compassionate* communication, there is a giver and the receiver.

To give or receive a good apology is an art. We can break apologies down into 3 steps:

1. **Apologize**
2. **Forgive**
3. **Begin Again**

*The giver* knows “I’ve hurt you. I realize it. As the offender, I offer you my [repair](https://www.gottman.com/blog/protecting-your-relationship-practices-for-making-effective-repairs/).”

*The receiver* sees their beloved struggle and realizes how important it is to hear the apology and accept it with love to be able to continue growing in your relationship.

Both the offender and the offended bear responsibility for their relationship and for bringing together what was torn asunder. *Responsible, loving repair is a multi-person job*. The weight of responsibility for a relationship is borne by each member.

Be sure you have calmed yourselves before attempting any repairs to conflict so you can be genuine in your efforts.

**The Process**

**Apologize.** The offender offers their apology in the form Own, Repair, Improve.

“I did X (*Own*) and I’m sorry (Y) (*Repair*) and I vow to do better (Z) (*Improve*).”

Using a *spilled milk* scenario, I might say,

“I should have been more careful with the milk (own).

I’m sorry I made a mess (repair),

and I’m going to slow down when I place things on the table

from now on (improve).”

**Forgive.** The offended person accepts the apology in the form of Thank, Acknowledge, Accept.

“Thank you for saying X (Thank), I appreciate you owning what you said Y (Acknowledge), and I forgive you for Z (Accept).”

Using this example, you might say,

“Thank you for saying that (thank).

I appreciate you owning that when you rushed, you made a mess that affected us both (acknowledge).

It’s ok, babe (forgive).”

It can be tempting to take a position of self-righteousness and punish your partner for making mistakes. Next time, it might be you offering your apology.

If you are in a state of love and compassion, you are in this moment, this relationship, and this life together. Keeping this in mind, strive to accept the apology with kindness. If this is difficult to do, take responsibility for your emotional state, take a break for self-care and soothing, being sure to let your partner clearly know ‘I’m still upset. *I’ll be back’*. Don’t let this go for more than 24 hours as this may lead to leaving the conflict unresolved.

**Begin again.** Unfinished business accumulates. So when process the small slights and even the big wounds as they happen, you can clear the table and begin again.

You might want to consider creating a “*begin again*” ritual. After the mindful apology, you share a hug, a kiss, or a high-five. Perhaps you are already doing this. Let this ritual be mutually appropriate and satisfying.