



TAKE-HOME SKILL: MAKING AMENDS FOR KIDS

"It's not a person's mistakes which define them – it's the way they make amends."

—Freya North

OVERVIEW

Strategies for parents and caregivers to help their children process their actions and discuss what they can do to make amends

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- When your child is seeking another person's forgiveness
- When your child makes a mistake
- To build positive relationships and personal growth through remedial actions
- To develop and hone your child's problem solving skills

TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 15 minutes

LEVEL

- PreK/Lower Elementary
- Upper Elementary
- Middle School

MATERIALS

- N/A

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Learn to respond to conflict
- Increase empathy and understanding of others' experiences
- Understand the power of making amends in fostering forgiveness
- Develop preliminary tools for conflict resolution
- Build stronger social ties

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills
- Responsible Decision-Making

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

For parents/caregivers: Take a moment to think about the last time you hurt someone or made a mistake. How did you repair the situation? What was difficult about it? How did it feel afterwards?

INSTRUCTIONS

This practice takes about 10 minutes. It can be done when your child is seeking another person's forgiveness, and it can also be done before such a situation arises.

Like adults, children can find themselves in situations where they recognize they've hurt or wronged someone either on purpose or by accident. Although you might be tempted to ask your child to say they're sorry, not all apologies are effective. A more helpful approach is to invite your child to think about how to make amends by following the steps below.

1. **Empathize:** Begin a conversation—either about something that happened to your child, or about a story your child is reading or watching where one character harmed another, regardless of their intention. Open by helping your child notice how the victim could be feeling.
2. **Brainstorm Actions to Help:** Ask your child, "What do you think you (or the character) could do to help right now?" Encourage them to move beyond a perfunctory and half-hearted "Sorry" to think about possible actions they could take to alleviate the hurt or right the wrong. This could be helping someone

rebuild a tower of cards that they knocked over, bringing an ice pack to someone who tripped over their foot, replacing someone's markers that they let dry out, or asking someone they left out of a game to play with them.

3. **Act:** Encourage your children to commit to an act of reparation (like the examples above) alongside their apologies.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

Do you notice if your child has changed how they respond to making mistakes or hurting others, e.g., have a more problem-solving attitude? Does your child better understand other people's experiences and emotions?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

In a [study](#), children who were six and seven years old built towers, which were knocked down by a college student who was playing alongside them. The children received one of four responses: a spontaneous apology, an apology after prompting, no apology, or an offer of restitution. While apologies or restitution led children to share more with the student compared to no apology, an offer of restitution was the only response that actually made kids feel better.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Apologies alone can work to [repair relationships](#) by rebuilding trust. However, not all apologies are created equal; the most effective ones include reparations in order to alleviate the hurt a person caused. Reparations help communicate remorse and, as children get older, they are more forgiving of others who show remorse while [apologizing](#). Reparations also help create new positive interactions between the individuals involved and can help them return to a cooperative relationship.

When kids offer restitution to someone they wronged, they are also taking steps to ease that person's hurt feelings. As children get older, they begin to see coerced apologies (when, for example, a parent tells another child to apologize to them) as [inauthentic](#). As a result, offering reparations is not only kinder but also more likely to be well-received.

Parents can help children understand the power of making amends in fostering forgiveness and stronger social ties. Because conflict will inevitably arise with others, making amends is a valuable relationship skill.

SOURCE

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