

Therapeutic Apology - Worksheet

Step 1. Identify the injury / event / problematic pattern and its unique impact.

*I want to talk to you about _____ and how hard that must have been for you. Especially because _____ (unique impact referencing the child's age, personality/temperament, etc. - one sentence). *it is important to resist the temptation to include rationales for the unfolding of events*

Step 2. Label and validate the painful emotions associated with the event (*attend to each emotion listed*).

I can imagine that (when I _____) you might have felt scared because... & because... (relating to feeling out of control or overwhelmed)

I can also imagine that you might have felt sad because... & because... (relating to longing, missing, loving)

I can imagine that you might have felt ashamed/embarrassed because... & because... (feeling defective or too much)

I can imagine that you would have felt angry because... & because... (you deserved something more / different)

I can also imagine that you would have felt really lonely/overwhelmed going through all of this on your own/without my support.

Step 3. Communicate a sincere apology.

I am so sorry (for the pain this caused you).

Step 4. State what could have been done instead and what will change. Ensure follow through is possible.

Knowing what I know now, I would have...(given the benefit of a crystal ball and all of the financial & social support resources)

Starting today...(+ it won't always go perfectly, but I won't stop working on this)

Step 5. Respond with validation to their reaction - whether anger, denial, reassurance or pain.

If anger or silence: e.g. *"I can understand why you would be angry. It probably feels like too little too late..."*

If reassurance: e.g. *"I can understand why you would want to reassure me. You've seen me hurting in the past and that's been really hard..."*

If denial: e.g. *"I can understand why you wouldn't remember this / would want to deny this, it's a hard truth in our family..."*

If pain or grief: e.g. *"I can understand why you'd feel pain. It's an old wound that hasn't received the attention it deserves..."*

Step 6. Then, repeat steps 3 and 4.



And I want you to know that I am so sorry. Knowing what I know now, I would have (repeat content from Step 4A). Starting today I will (repeat content from Step 4B).

If appropriate, you may wish to conclude with a variation of: “Your experience matters to me. If you think it could be helpful to share your experience, I am here to listen. It could be now, 2 weeks from now, or a year from now. I can be here for you in a different way.”

