

**Dr. Rob Smith**  
**Licensed Psychologist**  
**840 Winter St.**  
**Waltham, MA 02451**  
**781-890-8226**  
**Fax 781-890-8227**  
**DrRobSmith@Hotmail.com**

### **Steps Toward An Effective Apology**

When you do something wrong, you have broken the “contract” that binds us all in our relationships. While this contract may not be written or explicitly stated, we share certain “understandings” about how to treat each other. The Golden Rule, for example, advises us to treat others as we would like others to treat us. To follow this rule, however, we must be able to understand how our actions might impact others. In other words, we must have empathy for others’ needs or feelings. We can’t anticipate how to act toward someone in a sensitive or respectful way if we don’t take the time to consider that our actions might infringe upon the rights or feelings of another person.

Trust in our relationships builds over an ever-increasing series of experiences that tell us we can count on those people in our lives who respect us and keep their promises. When people break even an implicit promise, we begin to question how safe they are to have in our lives. We wonder if we misjudged their worthiness to be trusted, and if they will continue to hurt us. When this contract or understanding gets broken, the path toward healing begins with an apology. Rather than simply saying “sorry”, an effective apology requires that the offended party believes that the offender genuinely regrets their misdeed, and has the ability to avoid committing the same mistake again. In short, should that relationship continue, the apology is a crucial step toward re-negotiating a new “contract”. This contract spells out changes that will be made to enable the trust to be rebuilt. Even if the relationship ends, however, a well-conceived apology goes a long way toward the healing of any lingering resentments.

1. Acknowledge your mistake(s) – full disclosure: share what you did wrong, don’t hide additional wrongdoings that might re-surface and re-open the “wounds” of mistrust
2. Say why you did it – without seeming like you are shirking your responsibility for your mistake
3. Show empathy for how your actions impacted the offended person(s): “If I were you, I’d feel..”
4. Say what you wish you had done differently and why
5. State why you value your relationship with the person(s)
6. Propose a plan for how you would like to proceed with a healthier/happier relationship going forward

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**Complete These Steps Toward An Effective Apology:**

1. What I did wrong was:
2. The reason(s) why I did this was:
3. I know it hurt you because/if I were you, I'd feel:
4. If I had a chance to do it over, I would:
5. What I admire and respect most about you is:
6. Going forward, I hope that you/we can:
7. As a token of my sincerity, I plan to: