Mend Relationships with the 4-Part Apology

We all occasionally say or do things we regret. In the heat of the moment, our emotions can take control and we don’t think before we speak. Apologizing can be difficult, yet with this communication tool we can maintain positive relationships by authentically resolving our mistakes without adding drama to an already uncomfortable situation.

The 4-Part Apology is a powerful communication tool to help us maintain positive relationships, even when we have done or said something we regret. This process helps us to acknowledge our mistake and take responsibility for it by looking past the actual incident to the consequences of our behavior. By clearly acknowledging these consequences with the person we wronged and by openly choosing a different behavior, we can help the person move from feeling upset and resentful to being thoughtful and understanding.

It’s easy to remember the steps of the 4-Part Apology with this phrase: All About My Relationships, or AAMR, for acknowledge, apologize, make it right, and recommit.

- First, we acknowledge our mistake. By using ‘I’ statements, we take responsibility for our actions by admitting them. I acknowledge that I didn’t call you when I knew I was going to be late.

- Next we apologize and clearly state the cost or damage our actions caused. I apologize for making you wait and causing you frustration.

- Then we make it right by dealing with the consequences of our behavior and offer to make up for it with a solution. What can I do to make things right between us? And then we listen carefully to what the other person needs in order to feel a sense of closure to the situation.

- Finally, we recommit. We make a commitment to do whatever is needed to mend the relationship. From now on I’ll call you if I’m running late so that you know what’s happening and you don’t feel frustrated and hurt.

How many times have you been on the giving or receiving end of an “I’m sorry” that felt empty or incomplete? It can be difficult and uncomfortable to apologize sincerely. When we use the 4-Part Apology, we maintain a clear, open channel of communication that keeps our relationships strong.