



TEN WAYS TO BE POWER POSITIVE

#6 EFFECTIVE APOLOGY ACTIVITY

There are three main reasons why many conflicts escalate and don't turn out well.

- We avoid conflict because it is often associated with loss, pain, and even trauma.
- We respond to defensively to misunderstandings, hurt, and feedback.
- Because we don't intend to cause harm, it can be hard to acknowledge or even see when we are responsible for hurt or conflict, and now need to tend to that situation.

Here's the good news. Most relationship difficulties can be resolved quickly, and the relationship can be repaired and even grow stronger. When hurt or misunderstood, most people need one or more of these simple things. Here is an example: A teacher, trying to promote growth and learning, gave a student some challenging feedback about their presentation. Later the student came to the teacher confused and hurt by what they had said.

A. ACKNOWLEDGMENT. They need to have their pain or their upset or confusion acknowledged. "You seemed really upset about my feedback. I realize my words may have been painful. Can you tell me more about what that was like for you?"

B. INTENTION. They may want to know what your intention was, without having you reassign blame or validate your behavior. "I was intending to offer you some useful information about how you were using your voice." (Very short description. If you use only this step, or go too deeply into intention, they may experience this as an excuse.)

C. APOLOGY. They want an apology. This is a good formula: This is what I regret (specific behavior) and this is what I learned and am doing to make sure it doesn't happen again. "I regret several things—that I didn't ask you if this was a good time, didn't give you a concrete example, and didn't clarify that it was about how you used your voice, not who you are. Next time, I will be more clear in what I say and check in first about whether this would be a good time."

An effective apology is deeply important for healing and repair. For an apology to land well, it needs to be behaviorally specific and involve taking personal responsibility. These are some examples of apologies that don't get the job done.

- "I'm sorry." (no behavior named)
- "I'm sorry you were hurt." (not taking responsibility)
- "I was really busy and didn't mean to hurt you." (not taking responsibility/action to repair)
- "What's your part in this?" (shifting the blame)
- "I was maybe a little unskillful." (not taking the issue seriously)
- "I was under a lot of stress and feeling badly at the time." (defensive)

D. LEARNING. As you are repairing a relationship with someone, they may want to know what you have learned. People can be very generous when they understand that their hurt contributed to learning and growth. "I've learned more about what kind of feedback works for you. I will, in the future, ask if this is a good time, and leave time at the end to hear your responses and clear up misunderstandings."

E. REPAIR. When a relationship has been ruptured, an invitation to repair is important and welcome. Although they may bring their hopes forward to you, it also can convey a lot of caring when you initiate asking for what would work best for them. "Is there anything that I can do that would help repair this relationship?"

TRY THIS. Think of someone, a friend or someone at work, with whom there has been an unresolved relational difficulty. (Start with a fairly low-stakes relationship and situation.) Try these steps and see if you can resolve and repair. Ask for feedback from your other person, after the repair is made, about what you said or offered that was helpful in moving toward understanding and resolution.