

STRATEGIES FOR APOLOGIZING TO KIDS

MARCH 2015 RESOURCE SHARING

"I can't believe I said that!"

We've all had times when we couldn't believe the things we've said to our kids. Most parents have blurted out something like, "You'll never learn!" or, "Stop crying now, just stop it!" Then we wonder how these things we swore we'd never say to our kids—that we hated our parents for saying to us—come out of our mouths!

"A lot about being a parent is managing feelings of helplessness," says Michael Thompson, Ph.D. "The tantrums of little children make parents feel helpless. When older kids stand up to you and criticize your character, that brings up a different kind of helplessness. And when our kids make us feel helpless, our buttons get pushed, and we say things we wish we hadn't."

Often the best way to deal with it is to admit you're wrong and apologize. "Kids often enjoy nothing better than for their parents to be wrong—and feel validated when their parents apologize," adds Thompson.

So, instead of beating yourself up when you hear your mother's voice come out of your mouth, take a breath and apologize. The following strategies may help you figure what you need to say when an apology is in order.



Tell Your Child, "I Made a Mistake"

"It is so important for an adult to apologize because it shows the child it's OK to make mistakes and say you are sorry. When you say, 'I shouldn't have done that,' your child will have a rock-solid sense that her feelings matter to the people who are most important in her life."

John Gottman, Ph.D.

Author, *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child*

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Apologize for your behavior, not for yourself. You might tell your child, “I’ve been thinking about what happened and I don’t like what I said or did.”

Give yourself a momentary time out. You might say, “I’m sorry, I’m not thinking clearly right now. Give me a moment and I’ll get back to you.”

Ask your child, “What could I have done differently?” Ask her for help in figuring out what to do, and be open to her suggestions. You might say, “Did I make a mess of this?” Kids love to hear parents admit they are wrong.

You might also ask, “What could you have done differently?” In a non-accusatory way, review what occurred. Use this opportunity to discuss what you and your child could do differently next time.

Next time, try joking instead of over-reacting. You might say with a laugh, “Are you going to drive me totally crazy again?”

Remember that no parent is perfect. Think about what provoked your response. Also think about all the good things you do as a parent. Talk to a friend about what happened and find out how she might have handled it.

Think specifically about how you might behave differently next time. What is it about your child’s behavior that pushes your buttons? Is there something you can do or say that would change the way you react? You might try taking a deep breath before you speak, or walking out of the room until you figure out how you want to react. Think about this when you’re calm; the heat of the moment may not be the time to fix this problem, particularly if it’s become a pattern.

Learn from your mistakes—and move on!