

The Five Languages of Apology

Gary Chapman & Jennifer Thomas (2006)

[Summary of selected chapters prepared by Karen E. Sumi, MFT]

The Five Languages of Apology are:

1. Expressing Regret – “I am sorry”
2. Accepting Responsibility – “I was wrong”
3. Making Restitution – “What can I do to make it right?”
4. Genuinely Repenting – “I’ll try not to do that again”
5. Requesting Forgiveness – “Will you please forgive me?”

All 5 elements make a complete apology but people often have a primary language and if an apology does not include the language most important to that person, it will not resonate or be heard. We often apologize in our own language so it’s important to discover the other person’s language. Apologies can open the door to forgiveness and reconciliation.

Discover your own or another’s apology language by asking:

1. What do I want or need the person to say or do that would make it possible for me to genuinely forgive them?
2. What hurts most deeply about the situation?
3. Which language is most important (or do I usually use) when I apologize?

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## Additional Information About Each Apology Language

### 1. Expressing Regret – “I am sorry”

- Often an important language for “feeling” types
- Body language needs to be congruent
- Be specific – include details on what one did and how the other was affected
- No “but ...” – do not blame the other, this is an attack
- No excuses
- Even unintentional behavior or words that hurt can benefit from an apology
- Don’t say it to get someone off your back
- Focus on your behavior and the other’s pain, and how these are related
- Remorse is important

### 2. Accepting Responsibility – “I was wrong”

- Often an important language for “thinking” types
- Can be hard to do if self-worth is low; apologizing is seen as a weakness or being “bad”
- Difficult if person is immature since tendency will be to rationalize and blame others
- Admit mistakes

- No self-justifying, no excuses, no rationalizing and no blaming
- Remorse is important

3. Making Restitution – “What can I do to make it right?”

- Making amends “equalizes” the relationship and addresses the need for justice
- This meets the need for love – an apology reaffirms that one is still loved
- About providing reassurance of your love/care even though you have caused pain
- An “act of service” is a good option
- Make restitution in the other’s Love Language:
  - Words of Affirmation
  - Acts of Service
  - Receiving Gifts
  - Quality Time
  - Physical Touch

[See “The Five Languages of Love” for more information.]

4. Genuinely Repenting – “I’ll try not to do that again”

- Show a willingness to change, to act in a different way and not repeat the offense
- Step 1 – express intent to change
- Step 2 – develop a plan to change that is specific and concrete
- Step 3 – implement the plan – put it in writing and post where you can see it frequently
- If you fail or falter, admit your mistake and apologize quickly
- Keep trying – effort is important

5. Requesting Forgiveness – “Will you please forgive me?”

- This indicates you want to see the relationship fully restored
- Make a request, not a demand
- Forgiveness is a gift and has to be freely given
- It shows you realize you’ve done something wrong, whether intentionally or not
- It’s an admission of guilt
- Shows you are willing to put the future of the relationship in the hands of the offended person – the choice to forgive is theirs
- This language is hard for someone who needs to be in control
- Fear of rejection makes this difficult
- Fear of failure also makes this hard if a person attached to doing the right thing; admitting wrong can be interpreted as saying “I’m a failure”
- If the offense is major, has long-lasting consequences, or is repeated -- then time and patience are often necessary before forgiveness can be considered.