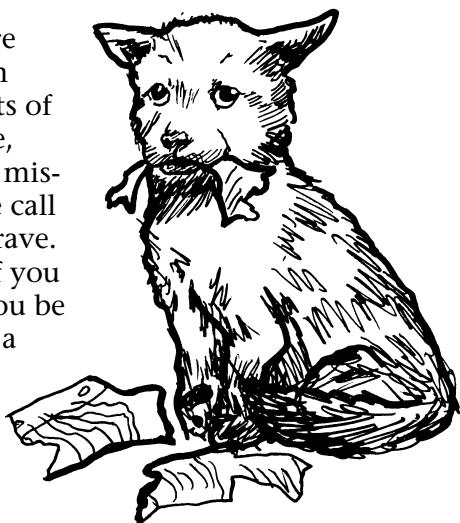


Chapter 22

Apologizing and Forgiving: Tasks for the Brave

Apologizing to someone when you are wrong is tough. Forgiving someone when they have wronged you is also tough. Lots of people, who are much older than you are, have never learned to apologize for their mistakes or to forgive others. That is why we call apologizing and forgiving tasks for the brave. If you knew that you would be happier if you learned how to do these things, would you be willing to stick your neck out and give it a try? Yes? You can't wait to start? Great!

Although apologizing and forgiving go hand-in-hand, we are going to talk about them one at a time, and we'll start with learning how to apologize.



Apologizing

Talking about apologizing, I screamed at my mom last night, I know I made her feel terrible. I wanted to tell her I was sorry this morning, but I just stared at my soggy cereal instead and acted like it was her fault. I thought about it all day.

Heather, 13

Why do people apologize and why is it so important? Suppose someone hurts you, even if they don't do it on purpose. You may

carry these bad feelings around inside you for a while and it may even turn into anger. Every time you see the person you'll remember the bad feelings. Your relationship with that person is damaged. If, however, the person says, *I'm sorry for what I said and did*, you may feel all the anger disappear. You may even feel like the relationship is as good as it was before that person hurt you. So apologizing is the first step to making up.

You apologize when you do something wrong or you do something that hurts someone else. When you apologize, it is important that you really feel sorry inside. If you do not feel sorry, but are merely saying the words, then it is usually best not to say anything at all. Sometimes when people are truly sorry, they even cry—but that doesn't mean that you should pull on your eye lashes to get some tears out if they don't flow naturally!

To say *I am sorry*, is only the first step in apologizing. The next step is to try to undo what you did wrong, if that is possible or necessary. The final step is make sure that you do not do it again.

Imagine if a friend lied to you. He was caught lying and he apologized to you, saying *I am so sorry, I did not mean to hurt you, it was a mistake on my part, can't we still be friends?* You decided that you would forgive your friend, but then only a few weeks later he does exactly the same thing again. How would you feel? Terrible, no doubt. You would probably have a very hard time trusting your friend after being lied to twice. If he was sorry for lying the first time, he should have changed his behavior. In other words, if his apology was real, he would not have done the same wrong thing twice and he would have done something to make up for what he did.

What Do People Apologize For?

As we mentioned, you apologize when you have done something wrong or hurt someone. Here are some examples of actions worthy of an apology. Can you think of any other situations that may occur in which you would need to apologize?

You might apologize for:

- ⊗ *Saying mean things to another person when you are mad or irritated.*
- ⊗ *Taking something that isn't yours without asking.*
- ⊗ *Being unreliable and showing up late or canceling plans with a friend for no good reason.*

- Ⓢ *Not fulfilling your promise.*
- Ⓢ *Laughing at one friend behind his back while with other friends.*
- Ⓢ *Losing your temper and screaming at someone.*
- Ⓢ *Cheating off of a friend and getting him in trouble.*
- Ⓢ *Lying to someone.*
- Ⓢ *Telling a friend's secret to another person.*
- Ⓢ *Leaving your friend out because you are jealous and want to be the center of attention.*

Are You Really Sorry?

How does it feel to say *sorry* and really mean it? How does it feel to say *sorry* and not really mean it? If you say *sorry* too many times and you do not mean it, do you think that other people will believe you when you apologize in the future? Probably not. Do you know anyone who often says that he is *sorry* but he really isn't? How does a person who is truly *sorry* act?

If a person is really *sorry* for something that she did, she will show it. You can show it by apologizing and trying to make up for the damage you did. You can also show it by not making the same mistake again. Carol, from New York, told us this story about a friend who wasn't so sincere when she apologized.

My friend Jane had been my best friend since we were five. As we grew up she really changed, though. She didn't have any other good friend aside from me. I felt sorry for her. However, she was always saying mean things to me. I think that it made her feel good to put me down. She would make herself look like the smartest, most talented person on the face of the earth. I was always second best—in everything. Even when she went out with my other friends she would put me down in front of them and insult me. After a long time of putting up with this I finally wrote her a letter. I told her that I couldn't be friends with her anymore—that she hurt my feelings too much and too often. I told her that she made me feel badly about myself. She called me on the phone crying. She told me that she was sorry and that she knew she had mistreated me for a long time. She said I was her only close friend and begged me to stay friends with her. I agreed. Two months later when I went to visit her she said that she had flushed my letter down the toilet and that she was having a hard time forgiving me for telling her how I felt. I knew at that moment that we could never be friends again. She didn't care about my feelings, she just didn't want to be without at least one friend.

Saying you're sorry just to get yourself out of a sticky situation isn't usually a good idea. Apologizing when you are not really sorry is a form of lying. So, before you apologize, think about what you have done and how the other person, or people, involved may feel. If you aren't sorry, then why not? Perhaps you can talk to the others involved and work out the problem together. Often it is the case that one person does not hold all of the blame, and you can benefit from having an honest discussion. Try not to let your pride get in your way. Pride is often the biggest block to being able to apologize. Many people are too proud to admit that they have done something wrong. Face it, we all make mistakes. Make sure that your pride doesn't fall into the category of *foolish pride*—stopping you from doing what you believe is right.

It's Never Too Late



It's never too late to say that you are sorry. Apologizing for something, even something that you did a long time ago, sets you free, like a bird that has escaped from his cage. Bad feelings that begin when something hurtful is done to someone don't go away magically. They may only be hiding under the surface, but saying you are sorry can help to clear them away forever. Also, any kind of bad feelings that you keep inside make a cage around your heart, barring you from being truly free and truly you. You have the key to free yourself with the words, *I am sorry*. Remember: better late than never.

You're Not the Only One!

You are not the only person who makes mistakes and has to apologize. Everyone makes mistakes sometimes and everyone has to apologize sometimes. Sometimes apologies are not only made between two people but between entire groups of people. Sometimes a president of a country will apologize to the people of another country if his country has done something clearly wrong and unfair to the other country. In other cases, one government may even give money and aid to a country that was considered their enemy before. This is not exactly an apology, but a way of making up. Can you think of any ways one country could help another, even if they had been enemies before?

Forgiving

Forgiving is the other side of apologizing. It is harder for some people to forgive than it is for them to apologize. If you have been hurt by someone, you may prefer to be as far away from that person as possible. You may spend hours thinking about it, or you may wish that you never knew that person. When someone has hurt you, you may feel really terrible. You may feel like screaming, shouting, crying, or running away and hiding. You may even feel that you want to get even with the person who has hurt you. In other words, you may want to hurt that person in return.

Most people who have thought a long time about apologizing and forgiving agree that *two wrongs don't make a right*. That means that if someone has hurt you, it will only make things worse if you try to hurt that person in return. The best and most difficult thing to do is to forgive the other person. How can you forgive someone?

What Happened?

Can you think of some common problems that arise and that you may need to forgive?

- ☉ *My friend did not invite me to go to the movies with her and her other friend even though she knew I was at home with nothing to do.*
- ☉ *My little brother took my walkman and sold it to his friend, his friend sold it to someone else, and I'll never see it again. I'm really mad!*
- ☉ *My father said that he would take me horseback riding and he forgot all about it.*
- ☉ *I heard my friend talking badly about me in the hall when she thought I wasn't around.*
- ☉ *My friend didn't wait for me after school to go and play hockey. I had to stay and talk to one of the teachers. That was really mean because I didn't know where the new rink was where they were playing.*
- ☉ *My favorite uncle forgot my birthday.*

Being Honest about Your Hurt Feelings

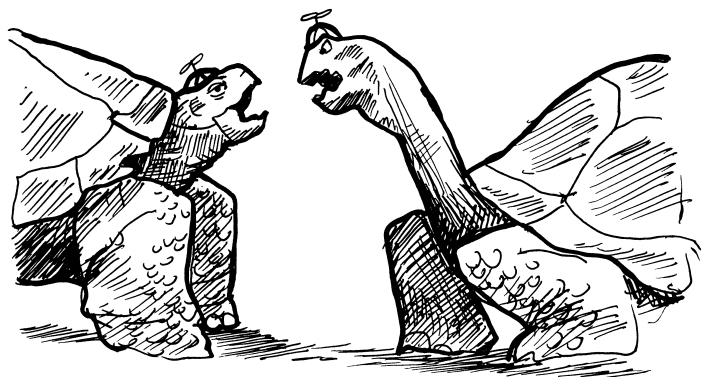
In most cases when we are hurt it is because someone we are close to, a friend or family member, has done or said something hurtful to us. Most of your anger comes from feeling hurt. Managing anger does not mean pushing it away and pretending that it is not real; in fact, that will only make it worse. When people are hurt and angry they usually do two things:

- ☉ *They go on the attack: scolding, criticizing, threatening or even kicking and hitting,*

OR

- ☉ *They withdraw: sulking, refusing to cooperate or giving the person they are upset with the silent treatment.*

Instead of blowing up or withdrawing, you can try to be as honest as possible about the way you feel. Being honest is hard. But maybe the person who hurt you does not know that he has done anything wrong and would be glad to know how you feel.



Sometimes friends and family members hurt each other accidentally. It is also possible that you are hurt because you misunderstood something that someone said to you. Even when we all speak the same language, it is easy to misunderstand one another.

Remember that the most important part of telling someone how you feel is the way in which you talk. As we said in the chapter on fairness, the way you say what you want to say can make all of the difference in the outcome. Here are some possible ways to express your anger or disappointment:

- ☉ *I feel hurt and forgotten about. I was dying to go to that movie with you guys.*
- ☉ *I feel terrible that my favorite skirt is ruined. Please be more careful with my things next time.*

- ☉ *I get excited when we make plans together and I was looking forward to going horseback riding. I'd appreciate it if when we make plans you'd stick to your part of it.*

Why Forgive?

It is very hard to forgive someone, but there are several good reasons for forgiving:

- ☉ *The bad feelings you keep inside against someone else who has hurt you make you feel sick and hurt you more than anyone else. They can even cause serious physical illness.*
- ☉ *Once you have forgiven someone, you may be able to begin to be friends again.*
- ☉ *You also will make mistakes and hurt people, so it is best to forgive others as you will also want to be forgiven sometimes.*



What Does it Mean to Forgive?

We have all heard the old saying *forgive and forget*. To forgive someone is to let go of your angry feelings, to accept an apology and to forget about the incident and never bring it up again. Sounds simple! But it's not, or everyone would be doing it.

Forgiving Yourself

We all make mistakes and say and do things that we're not too proud of. When you make a mistake you may be the only person that is hurt. You may hurt yourself by your actions more than anyone else. So, it is very important that you learn to forgive yourself. People who cannot forgive themselves start to dislike themselves, and feel disappointed in themselves. Worse yet, when you can't forgive yourself you carry around feelings of guilt and regret—what a weight that you don't need!

One way to learn to forgive yourself is to think about yourself as your own friend. Imagine that you had a friend, someone you knew very well and loved, and that friend hurt you. If that friend was sorry and apologized, wouldn't you forgive her? Try to think of yourself as your own friend and don't be too hard on yourself.



Journal

Some people never learn to forgive or to apologize. These people go around feeling hurt and angry their whole life. If you could talk to one of these people, what would you say to try to help them?



To Do

1. Can you think of anyone to whom you owe an apology? Write a short letter to that person telling them how you feel and why you are sorry. If you have the courage mail the letter too!
2. In pairs, think of some situations in which one person owes another person an apology, then think of something that person can do to show he is really sorry (you might want to use some of the examples in the chapter).
3. Do you need to forgive someone right now? What if that person will not apologize to you, but you do not want to hurt yourself by your bad feelings? Try sitting quietly and writing out the following: *The person I need to forgive is _____, and I forgive you for _____.*
I release my anger and I am free of my negative feelings. It may take a while for you to really let go of your bad feelings, but keep trying this exercise and you may be surprised to find you feel better.
4. In pairs, think of situations in which you would need to apologize and practice apologizing in that imaginary situation with your partner. Is it difficult to say you are sorry? Are there some people that you can apologize to more easily than others? Why? Who is it the most difficult for you to apologize to? The most easy?



Key Ideas

- ☞ An apology backed up by good actions can help make everyone feel better.
- ☞ It is not easy to apologize, but when you do you will almost always feel better.
- ☞ Forgiveness is very important. When people hold bad feel-

ings inside for a long time, those feelings make them feel unhappy and sometimes even sick.



**Those who forgive most shall be
most forgiven.**

Phillip James Bailey

