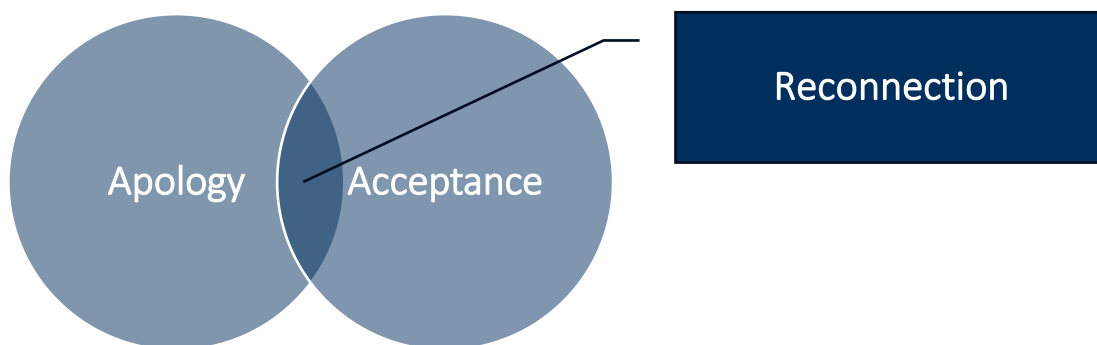


# MAKING AND RECEIVING APOLOGIES

**Apologies are an exchange.** Offering an apology is one half of the exchange, receiving the apology is the other.

## AMENDS + ACCEPTANCE = APOLOGY EXCHANGE

*You can only ever control your side of an apology exchange.* Partial exchanges, where an apology is offered but not received or where a person forgives or releases another party from blame without being apologized to, are common but are unlikely to feel complete as they are only half of a reconnection process. A passable working relationship may continue with a partial exchange, but reconciliation and reconnection are made possible when an apology is both extended and received.



The Apology Exchange © Karissa Sovdi

### Benefits of an apology exchange

- Acknowledge harm
- Reduce resentment
- Re-establish the opportunity for trust
- Make relationship expectations explicit
- Explore boundaries
- Find a way to move forward
- Release the emotional grip the situation has held

### Limitations of an apology exchange

- Cannot reverse the harm caused
- Does not necessarily change behaviour
- May not return the relationship to normal
- May not rebuild all of the lost trust

### What to expect after an apology exchange

- Early interactions may feel awkward
- Trust will likely need to be rebuilt over time
- Boundaries may need to be reset and maintained
- The relationship will likely change
- Both parties will likely feel better
- You may need to mentally accept the situation more than once to move past it

Relationships often emerge from a conflict stronger, but sometimes the damage done changes the relationship forever. In a workplace setting it is important to consider what each party needs in order to be able to work together respectfully.

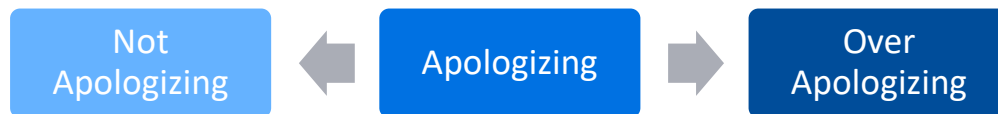
## APOLOGIZING

An apology focuses more on **impact** than intention and is about how your behaviour impacted the other person, rather than how you justified it in the moment. It is not your job to make the other person accept an apology, but to offer it with sincerity and good will.

### Tasks of an apology

1. Acknowledge responsibility (self-reflection)
2. Sincere expression of regret (using words of apology such as “I’m sorry.”)
3. Acknowledge harm (identify what you did and its impact)
4. Offer repair or amends as best as possible (what you’re going to do to improve the situation.  
*\*Some amends may be enforced by a formal process: eg. paying restitution).*
5. Request forgiveness or acceptance of the apology (without being entitled to it) *\*You can apologize even if someone doesn’t accept it.*

**Sample Script:** I’m sorry that I (insert behaviour). I know it impacted you in this way (insert impact). I deeply regret the (emotional/physical damage) I’ve caused. In future I will (insert amends). Can you please forgive me?



### Not Apologizing

- Apologizing for the person’s feelings (I’m sorry you feel that way)
- Justifying or making excuses for your actions (I did it because...)
- Apologizing in words, but continuing the offending behaviour
- Expecting or demanding them to forgive you once you’ve requested it
- Making promises you can’t keep / Offering amends that you will not be able to meet

If you are not prepared to take responsibility for your part of an interaction then hold off on apologizing until you have a clearer understanding of what you could have done differently. An insincere apology will likely do more damage.

### Over Apologizing

- Re-apologizing over and over hoping for a different response
- Offering gifts or favours after an apology in order to earn the person’s good will
- Denying your needs to make the other person happy
- Continuing to punish yourself once a wrong has been righted

If you are confident you have been sincere, taken responsibility, and done what you can to repair a wrong, you may have to live with a reality where the other person chooses not to forgive you or accept your apology. Be careful not to use this as an excuse to cause further harm.

## ACCEPTING APOLOGIES

Accepting an apology does not mean you are saying the behaviour was ok or implying that trust is automatically regained. It doesn't even mean that the relationship will continue. It is acknowledging that the other person has made a bid to repair and indicating your willingness to move past the incident at hand. You can accept an apology while also establishing new boundaries. Apologies are rarely successful where they are coerced or demanded.

### Tasks of receiving apologies

- Acknowledge what you heard
- Clarify the impact if it was not addressed or articulated
- Accept the apology / extend forgiveness *\*You can forgive someone who doesn't apologize.*
- Establish new expectations and boundaries for moving forward

**Sample Script:** I was hurt (or insert the impact they stated) by your behaviour (insert the behaviour they stated). I accept your apology. Here is what I need to move forward...

### Declining an apology

You might choose to decline an apology, especially if you suspect it to be insincere. Declining an apology is different than passively ignoring an apology and usually involves an active stance that requires decision and expression, such as saying, "No, I do not accept your apology" if it is safe to do so.

If you decide to decline an apology, you might want to reflect on how you can continue to move forward in a good way in your life and work regardless.

### In accepting or declining an apology, avoid the following behaviours:

- Ignoring the apology without expressly declining it
- Accepting the apology in words, but holding the person's behaviour against them in action
- Seeking retribution beyond the agreed upon amends/ trying to "make the person pay."
- Reminding the person (or others) of the wrong they've apologized for in future interactions

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