

Teaching kids to apologize

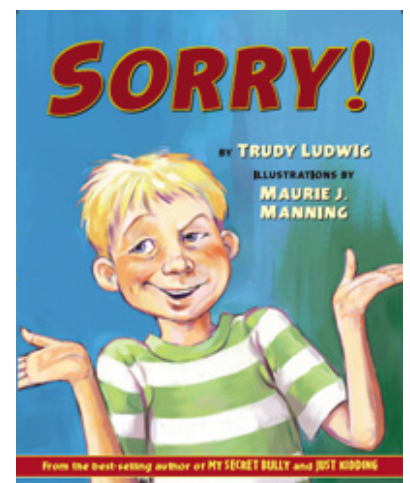


From our guest contributor, Michele Borba

Have you noticed how apologizing has become almost a lost art these days? A great number of adults—not kids—seem to have forgotten how to say that glorious two-word simple phrase, “I’m sorry!” And if the offender (whether it be government officials to movie stars to plagiarizing authors to “poor-sport” athletes to our own friends) does give an apology, notice how it often sounds insincere?

Sorry!

How are kids going to learn this great skill unless we model it ourselves? That’s why I adore Trudy Ludwig’s book, **“Sorry!”** (Tricycle Press – available on amazon or in your local bookstore). It’s plain wonderful. I have to admit I’m a big fan of Trudy’s books (her other books **“My Secret Bully”** and **“Just Kidding”** are fabulous also).



Rarely do children's books model for young readers personal accountability and responsibility the way **Sorry!** does.

Trudy's thoughtful, one-of-a-kind story on the power of apology shows how a child can take ownership of a hurtful behavior and then right his or her wrong. The story also offers invaluable life lessons on empathy and compassion to children (and adults) alike.

Sorry also helps kids see from the other side – how their actions were hurtful and why they should make amends. And that's exactly what is missing too often. Kids seem to be on "auto-pilot" when they apologize. "I'm sorry" is said too quickly with no meaning behind those words.

Pick up a copy! Use it in your classroom, Boys and Girls Club, or with your kids at home. It's one of those perfect books you want to keep on your shelf for the perfect moment.

Five Steps to Giving a Sincere Apology

As you read Trudy's book and discuss the reasons why it's important to make amends, teach your kids the simple five steps for apologizing. The skill of apologizing (along with 25 other critical friendship skills) is from my book, **Nobody Likes Me, Everybody Hates Me: The Top 25 Friendship Problems and How to Solve Them**. Many teachers are turning the steps into a chart and posting it in their classroom.

You'll have to model these steps with your children until they finally understand the parts of a *sincere* apology.

Keep in mind that the easiest way for kids to learn how to apologize is by copying our own example. So the next time (and the next...and the next...) you make a mistake, admit it to your kids. Just make sure you add two powerful words, "I'm sorry!"

Essential to our children's moral development is realizing that personal actions do impact others. If you do something

that causes another person pain, you need to make amends. The phrases to say to your child as you teach how to apologize are in quotations. Of course, put in your own words and values in your discussion, but remember that the key is that kids need to know there must be sincerity in their words. You'll also need to take your child's age and maturity into consideration as you begin the process of teaching the skill. As children's moral maturity and empathy develops, so will the meaning of their words.

Step 1. Think about what you did wrong.

Get specific. "Did you say something that hurt your friend's feelings? Did you say something behind her back? What exactly are you sorry for?"

Step 2. Find the best time and place to apologize.

"If you really, really can't face your friend, you could write a letter or call him on the phone . But find a time when you won't be interrupted and you can focus on telling the person your concerns."

Usually it's best to keep the apologize private so as not to embarrass your child. But that, of course, depends upon the circumstance.

Step 3. Say what you're sorry for.

"Be brief, sincere, and honest. Say exactly what you did that you're sorry for "I...[fill in what you did]...and then add I'm sorry."

You might want to briefly describe what happened. Your friend may see it differently, so it's a good idea to share your view of the problem."

Step 4: Tell how you are going to make things better.

"So what are you going to do about your actions? Tell your friend! Just saying "I'm sorry" doesn't necessarily fix things. Let your friend know what you plan to do to make things better."

The key here is to help your child think about how the other person feels—disappointed, upset, mad, sad. Discuss the thoughts and feelings that can evolve. Sincere apologies help the injured or hurt child know that the child cares and wants to make things better—not an easy task especially for a young child. As Ludwig points out: “Making a sincere apology is hard work. It requires personal responsibility and remorse for the wrongdoing, along with a determined effort to make up for the hurt one has caused others.”

Stress that apologizing is hard work. It can be embarrassing – after all, the child is admitting he was wrong or even a weakness! “It actually takes courage and strength to honestly admit the error of our ways,” Ludwig points out.

Step 5: Give your friendship time to heal.

“Remember, you can’t make anybody do anything she doesn’t want to do. And that means you can’t make your friend accept your apology. All you can do is admit you’re wrong and try to make amends.”

Then practice, practice, practice at home so your child can use the skill in the real world.

Showing children a skill is always more powerful than telling them ...so model it. Then remember to admit when you’re wrong and say a sincere, “I’m sorry!” to your kids.

When kids recognize there are consequences to their actions which can be helpful or hurtful it helps them take a big leap forward in becoming more thoughtful, compassionate and responsible. Our job as parents is to help stretch our children’s moral development. Stopping and helping our children learn and practice the skills of apologizing is an important part of boosting their character.

Thanks for reading. Tell us what you think in the comments.

Ready to teach your kids more life skills? Check out our

Family's Guide to Teaching Good Character.

Learn more about character education.