

The Art of the Apology A Parent's Stealth Weapon

"Why should I apologize? She was the one badmouthing me! NO WAY!"

Yes, WAY! An apology is a way to sneak into the fortress of anger your child has enclosed herself in. Besides being the bigger, better thing to do, it fits with the paradoxical strategies we find effective with our difficult kids; another backwards way of getting inside your child's head in a way they don't expect.

Let's look at what is absolutely ineffective and guaranteed to motivate the teen to build thicker stronger fortress walls.

- Lectures, threats, ranting, yelling, or guilt dumping
- Demanding an apology
- Ignoring what you just said or did. Sweeping it under the rug.

When we apologize, the teen is caught off guard and they don't know what to say or think. While they're standing there gaping at you in astonishment, they are likely to actually listen---if you don't blow it.

An apology allows us to get in important lessons such as humility, honesty, empathy, respect and self-disclosure. The child will respect you when you demonstrate respect for her. This means we do *not* condescend or talk down to teens.

- We need to apologize immediately or the situation will escalate.

Let's look at a dialogue—

Mom (yelling) Where's the \$20 bill I had in my purse? Did you take it to buy that video game I already said 'no' to? My God! I'm raising a thief!

Teen (yelling back and furious) Geez! Now you're accusing me of stealing?! Don't you remember giving me a \$20 this morning for my field trip? You're crazy! I've got a nutcase for a mom! I'm not staying here with Whacko. I'm calling Dad to pick me up!

Mom (still yelling) Well, can you blame me for not trusting you? You've taken money from me before. And you're going to your father's over my dead body!!

Teen Oh yeah, mom! Like 6 years ago when I was 9! I'm SO outta here! (teen leaves, furious.)

Well, how did that go? Was that an apology? (hint: no way!)

The first thing to do is take a deep breath and ask yourself, "*Where did that come from?*" Then do damage control immediately.

Elements of an Effective Apology

- Take full responsibility for your behavior.
- No "ifs, ands, or buts." Never say, "You made me say that! Or "Well if you hadn't done _____"

- Be absolutely sincere and humble.
- Lower your voice and speak slowly in short sentences. Don't raise your hands.
- Do some self disclosure. "I'm so sorry. I shouldn't have got on you that way. It's just that I'm overly sensitive about stealing right now, because of the divorce. I'm far from perfect. Please know this wasn't about you. Of course I know you're not a thief. I shouldn't have taken out my frustrations on you. It really has nothing to do with you. I hope you'll forgive me and I'll really try to do better."
- Never demand an apology in return, as in: "I'll say 'sorry' if you will." Do not put part of the blame on your child.
- Never ignore what you just did or sweep the incident under the rug as if it never happened. You will lose the respect of your child.
- When the teen is right, or even partially right, it's important to acknowledge it. It earns your child's respect.

Guess what the outcome of this type of response will be? Let's practice the art of the *effective apology*."