Taking responsibility for your injurious actions includes saying what happened, admitting your role, apologizing, and offering to make amends.

Forgiveness entails reflecting on the other person’s experiences, finding some compassion for their circumstances and perspective, and letting go of resentment.

Forgiveness does not require reconciliation.

➤ Why should we take responsibility for actions of ours that endanger or harm others and/or hurt their feelings?

➤ What makes an apology sincere?

➤ What is the “power of forgiveness?”

Students will be able to
- Demonstrate a sincere apology.
- Identify the positive effects of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Personal responsibility, apology, regret, remorse, make amends, condone, reconcile

This lesson explores taking personal responsibility for our injurious actions and forgiving others for their offenses and mistakes. In a timed writing exercise, students reflect on personal experiences of apologizing and forgiving. From the follow-up discussion, they generate steps for making a sincere apology and explore the power of forgiveness. On the second day, students critique and improve upon apologies made in hypothetical scenarios, and then role-play those scenarios using their improved apologies. Several student pairs perform their role play in front of the class, and receive feedback and reinforcement.

Interpersonal problem solving requires that the parties involved take personal responsibility for their actions. Making a sincere apology can be a difficult social skill to develop and exercise, and forgiving can be even harder. Boys, especially, are socialized not to admit wrongdoing. The actor John Wayne epitomized this viewpoint when he said Never apologize and never explain...It’s a sign of weakness. Breaking through this barrier may be tough; helping students to view apologizing and forgiving as a mark of courage and strength will help in this endeavor.

Students also benefit from realizing that forgiving does not condone the offense, nor does it mean that the offense should be overlooked and
forgotten. Furthermore, forgiveness does not necessarily lead to reconciliation. Sometimes relationships have been the source of so much pain—especially in cases involving child abuse and neglect—that the bond no longer exists, or time and professional help may be needed to effect healing. Still, letting go of resentment is an important step to take, as it can release the forgiver from the pain and mistrust they felt within the relationship. Forgiveness benefits the forgiver as well as the one who is forgiven.

### Teaching Tips

- Readily apologize when you are in the wrong.
- Demonstrate how to graciously accept apologies.
- Acknowledge students for showing courage and strength in apologizing, and for graciously accepting apologies.
- Note that everyone makes mistakes, and that the important thing is how one deals with them.
- Clarify that forgiving does not condone the offense, nor does it imply that the offense is insignificant and should be forgotten.
- Acknowledge that forgiving may take time and does not need to result in reconciliation.

### Preparation

- Write essential questions on the board.
- Make one copy of Handout 4.10.2, cut it up into role-play cards, fold the cards, and place them in a bowl.
- Copy Handout 4.10.1 (one copy per student).
- One sheet of poster paper and a felt-tip marker

### Recommended Resources


This organization offers constructive approaches to difficult and intractable conflicts.


This short piece explains how to make an effective apology and discusses why an apology can be such a significant step toward repairing a damaged relationship.


This organization supports a variety of research projects that deal with the power of forgiveness and reconciliation.
LESSON OUTLINE

Writing Window
(20 minutes)

Identify the essential questions.
The essential questions for this class session and the next one are

▸ Why should we take personal responsibility for actions of ours that endanger or harm others and/or hurt their feelings?
▸ What makes an apology sincere?
▸ What is the “power of forgiveness?”

Resolving interpersonal problems is a two-way street. Each person involved in a conflict must take personal responsibility for her or his part in it.

• What does it mean to take personal responsibility? (Holding yourself accountable for your actions)

Taking personal responsibility for actions that hurt others should include apologizing and offering to make amends, especially if we want to reconcile with the other person.

Have students complete Handout 4.10.1: Reflection on Apologizing and Forgiving.

Today, we will start with a writing exercise in which you will reflect on two past experiences: one that involved apologizing and one that involved forgiving. You will have 5 minutes to answer the questions on the handout.

[Ask two different students to read aloud the quotes and the questions. These will help them to reflect on their experiences.]

[After five minutes, ask students to voluntarily share their answers to the reflection questions. As students contribute, paraphrase what they have said. You don’t need to draw conclusions at this point.]

On the board or on an overhead transparency, write and discuss steps for making a sincere apology.

• What is the purpose of an apology? (To resolve a conflict, heal a relationship, and take responsibility for our actions)

[Help students compose their answers to the following question as “Steps for Making a Sincere Apology.” Write them on the poster paper.]

• How do you make a sincere apology? (A sincere apology includes: acknowledging having committed the offense and the fact that it caused harm, taking personal responsibility even if the offense was unintended, a statement of regret or remorse, a promise not to repeat the offense, and an offer to make amends.)

• Do you have to feel regret or remorse in order to apologize? (An apology will not be sincere without a true sense of regret.

personal responsibility: holding yourself accountable for your actions

Discussion of Apologizing
(10 minutes)

apology: an expression of regret at having caused trouble for someone

Write Steps for Apologizing on poster paper.

regret: feeling sorry for something you did
remorse: deep regret for a wrong committed

Pass out Handout 4.10.1: Reflection On Apologizing and Forgiving.
EXPLORATION 1: \textit{Identify roadblocks to apologizing.}

- Is it difficult to apologize? Why? (Explore not wanting to be wrong, gender or cultural expectations, looking weak, fear of how the person might respond to the apology, and the concern that the other person may share blame but not apologize.)

- If you think you haven’t done anything wrong and you cannot give a sincere apology, what should you do? (Say you are sorry that the person feels wronged by something you have done, and then explain your actions.)

EXPLORATION 2: \textit{Explore what it means to forgive.}

- What is the point of forgiving others? (Frees you from resentment, helps you to heal and move on)

- What might you say in accepting an apology? (\textit{I appreciate and accept your apology.})

- When is it difficult to forgive? (When the offense is great, you are not ready to heal, you feel the apology is not sincere, or the other person has apologized before but continues to commit the same offense)

- What would you say if you are not ready to forgive? (Say you need more time, or that the offense is too hurtful and damaging.)

Some wrongs, such as child abuse, are so offensive that they may be too difficult to forgive. You can learn, however, to eventually overcome feelings of hurt and betrayal. [Note that it is important to get counseling in dealing with these situations.]

Forgiving does not mean that you will forget about what happened or that you condone or accept the offense. Sometimes people mistakenly say “forgive and forget.” While it is important not to dwell on your wounds and not to make them the center of your life, it is also important to remember and learn from your experiences.

- Does forgiving mean that you reconcile with the person? (You do not have to reconcile with those you forgive. Sometimes there is so much pain that the bond cannot be restored, or sometimes it is better for your psychological health not to renew the relationship.)
Wrap-up
(< 5 minutes)

• How can you work toward forgiving someone? (Try to understand how they are experiencing things and what prompted their actions. With horrific offenses, you may find this to be very difficult if not impossible.)

• What is the power of forgiveness? (Forgiving can free you of toxic emotions such as resentment.)

Forgiveness benefits the forgiver as well as the one who is forgiven.

• Does anyone want to share a time when you experienced “the power of forgiveness?” How did it make you feel? How do you think the other person felt?

Homework
(None)

NEXT CLASS

Review Apologizing
(5 minutes)

• Review what makes a sincere apology, from the previous class session.

[Refer to the poster on Steps for Making a Sincere Apology created in the previous class session.]

• Have students improve an apology.

Sometimes people make public apologies. In 1995, on a radio talk show, U.S. Senator Alphonse D’Amato used an exaggerated Japanese accent to mock Judge Ito, who was presiding over the O.J. Simpson trial. After receiving much criticism, the Senator issued the following press release.

[You may want to write it on the board.]

If I offended anyone, I’m sorry. I was making fun of the pomposity of the judge and the manner in which he’s dragging the trial out.

• Is this a sincere apology? Why or why not?

• How can it be improved?

After the public outcry that surrounded the incident, Senator D’Amato issued a second apology, this time on the floor of the Senate:

It was a sorry episode. As an Italian-American, I have a special responsibility to be sensitive to ethnic stereotypes. I fully recognize the insensitivity of my remarks about Judge Ito. My remarks were totally wrong and inappropriate. I know better. What I did was a poor attempt at humor. I am deeply sorry for the pain that I have caused Judge Ito and others. I offer my sincere apologies.

• Does this meet the criteria for a sincere apology? If not, how might it be further improved?
LESSON 4.10 | Apologizing and Forgiving

Role Plays

(35 minutes)

Pass out role-play cards.

Perform a model role play for a situation on one of the role-play cards.

[Read one of the role-play cards aloud. Ask students what is wrong with the apology and how it can be improved. With a student, do a role play in which you follow the steps for apologizing and model what a sincere apology for the situation given on the role-play card would be like. Afterwards, have students evaluate whether you followed the steps for a sincere apology and suggest areas in which you could have done better.]

Have students draw a role-play card from a bowl; provide time for pairs to discuss the situation and practice a role play.

[Tell students that they will now have a chance to practice making a sincere apology. Have student pairs draw a role-play card from a bowl or hat. They should decide what is wrong with the apology given on the role-play card and why, and discuss how they could improve upon it. Then they should practice role-playing a sincere apology for the situation. Students should take turns playing the two roles, so that everyone has an opportunity to give and receive an apology.]

Ask several pairs to role-play in front of the class.

[Afterwards, have 3-4 student pairs read aloud their scenario, critique the apology given on their role-play card, and role-play a sincere apology in front of the class. The other students can give feedback and reinforcement.]

Wrap-up

(5 minutes)

Review the essential questions.

- Why should we take responsibility for actions of ours that endanger or harm others and/or hurt their feelings?
- What makes an apology sincere?
- What is the “power of forgiveness?”

Homework

[While this is not an assignment, ask students to consider making an apology to someone if they feel moved to do so.]
Facilitate a class discussion on what role apologizing and forgiving could play in this novel. Ask students to choose between the following two assignments:

- Write a 12th chapter showing Bryon resolving his problems with Mark and Cathy.
- Pretend that they are Bryon, and write a letter to Mark and a letter to Cathy.

Ask students to volunteer to read their chapter or letters in class.

As with most forms of communication, honest and sincere apologies can often ward off conflict, and in some cases much more. The short story “The Necklace” by Guy de Maupassant shows what can happen when amends are made without an admission of guilt and without an apology. Ask students to compose a letter of apology (with an offer to make amends) from the point of view of Mathilde Loisel immediately after she loses the necklace, and then draft a reply from Mme. Forestier, the owner of the necklace. Follow that up with a discussion of the following:

- Why do people often try to hide their mistakes or refuse to own up to them?
- How was Mme. Loisel hurt by her own pride?
- How might Mme. Loisel’s life have turned out differently if she had admitted she’d lost the necklace right after it happened?

Ask students to write about any roadblocks they have encountered in taking responsibility for their actions. How can these obstacles be overcome?

In recent years, groups of people have sought apologies and reparations from the U.S. Government for historical wrongs committed against them and/or their ancestors. These include African-Americans for being forced into slavery, Native Americans for the taking of their land and for being resettled on reservations, and Japanese-Americans for the confiscation of their homes and businesses and for being forced to live in internment camps during World War II. Divide students into small groups, and have them research one of these as a case study. Should the U.S. Government apologize and make amends? Why or why not? What would a letter of apology look like? What might making amends consist of? What are the benefits of a public apology, even if amends are not offered or made?

**LESSON EXTENSIONS**

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Reflection On Apologizing and Forgiving

*A stiff apology is a second insult… The injured party does not want to be compensated because he has been wronged; he wants to be healed because he has been hurt.*

—Gilbert K. Chesterton, early 20th century essayist and novelist

1. Do you agree with this quote? Write about a time when you felt forced to make an apology but didn’t really feel sorry for what you did. How do you think the other person felt? Then write about a time when you received a “stiff” apology. How did you feel afterwards?

*The weak can never forgive.
Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.*

—Mohandas Gandhi, nonviolent statesman who led India to independence from Great Britain in 1947

2. Do you agree with this quote? Write about a time when you forgave someone for something they had done. What did you say and do? Was there power in forgiving? How did you feel afterwards? How do you think the other person felt?
Role-Play Cards (copy & cut)

Directions: Copy this page, and cut out the role-play cards along the dotted lines. Have each student pair draw one card out of a bowl, discuss what is wrong with the apology, and role-play a sincere apology for the situation.

You borrowed your friend’s favorite CD and accidentally scratched it. “Sorry about the CD. I’d buy you a new one, but I’m broke.”

Your best friend told you a secret, and you told it to another friend, who then spread it around. “Sorry, but you should have told me you didn’t want me to tell anyone.”

A long-time friend is acting hurt because you are spending time with a new friend. “What, can’t I have other friends?”

You’ve been slacking off on your chores, and it’s been hard on your mom. “Sorry about the dishes. I was tired, too.”

You had an argument with your brother and said some things that hurt him. “I’m sorry I hurt you, but you sometimes say things that hurt me, too.”

Your friend is avoiding you after you pressured her to break up with her boyfriend. “Hey, I was only looking out for you.”

You made a nasty remark about a guy’s haircut, and he wants to fight you now. “I didn’t mean it like that. Can’t you take a joke?”

Your best friend is irritated because you have again bought the same clothes that he or she did. “We just like the same things. I can’t help it if you buy them first. You have more money than I do.”

You broke a date with a friend because another friend was sad and needed someone to talk to. “I’m sorry. If you were bummed, wouldn’t you want me to drop everything and help you?”

You stay up late, and your track coach is disappointed in your race time the next day. “Don’t worry; I’ll do better next time.”

You made fun of a kid last year and feel badly about your behavior now. “Sorry I was such a (blankety-blank) last year.”

You did a poor job on your portion of a group project because you were tired and you started working on it late. “I couldn’t help it; I have to run track all afternoon, and then I’m too tired to do homework.”