

**EAS/Employee Assistance Services**  
**Employee Assistance-Psychotherapy**  
**Tom Lavin MFT, LADC**  
**557 California Avenue**  
**Reno, NV 89509**  
**775-323-3330**  
[www.EASEAP.com](http://www.EASEAP.com)

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## ***Apology***

Tom Lavin MFT, LADC

### **Apology: Healing Relationships, Building Bridges**

**“If mistakes go on without acknowledgement and apology (or are covered up), relationships can be poisoned.”** Ken Blanchard and Margaret McBride, “The One Minute Apology”

***“A genuine apology...is one of the most profound interactions...It has the power to restore damaged relationships.”*** Dr. Aaron Lazare, “Go Ahead and Say You’re Sorry,” *Psychology Today*

**Apology:** Acknowledgment expressing regret or asking pardon for an offense.

**Amends:** 1). To improve; 2). To remove errors; 3). To better one’s conduct.

In a recent class I offered to employees on healing family and work relationships through apologizing, there was a great laugh when I showed the Gary Larson cartoon of the man and his dog, faced off against one another, each grabbing a rolled up magazine. The dog is pointing at the man and saying, “I’ll put my

magazine down when you put yours down.” We were, of course, laughing at ourselves and at the dynamic around apologies that often occurs: “You apologize first for the way you hurt me, then I’ll apologize for how I hurt you.”

### **Apology: Takes Courage/Humility**

Apologizing is hard because it requires that we have to take an honest look at ourselves and admit we did something that harmed another person.

- Apologizing is hard because we need to have empathy for how he/she was hurt and how he/she felt.
- Apologizing is hard because it requires humility and courage to take responsibility and go to someone we have hurt and, face to face, acknowledge we did something that hurt that person.
- Apologizing is hard because our culture often values winning, not making mistakes and “not looking weak”.
- [Fake apologies: “I apologize for whatever I did”; “Mistakes may

have been made”; “If anyone was hurt or offended...”.]

Apologizing is important for us in maintaining a sense of personal honesty and integrity: by showing empathy, caring and respect for the person we have harmed, *we help restore that part of the person that we damaged* (dignity, self-esteem, a personal relationship, financial security).

### **Actions That Harm Others**

What are the actions that harm others and require that we apologize?

1. Betrayal of trust
2. Breaking a promise
3. Lying or deceiving
4. Abuse (physical, emotional, sexual)
5. Gossiping, slandering
6. Breaking a confidence
7. Creating a negative, pessimistic environment
8. Mean, cruel, unfair, exploitative, manipulative
9. Humiliating, disrespectful treatment
10. Unfair treatment
11. False accusation
12. Beliefs or affiliations denigrated
13. Privacy violated

### **Making Amends and Apologizing**

In making amends we take personal responsibility for harm done; we commit to personal change; and we commit to repairing the damage we have done and communicate a strong desire not to repeat the offense.

#### **In making amends, we:**

1. Honestly acknowledge to ourselves that we made a mistake and that we harmed someone.
2. Feel sorrow for how we have harmed the person (emotionally, financially, etc.).

3. Forgive ourselves for the mistake we made.
4. Forgive the person for any mistake he /she made and for any harm he /she has done us.
5. Tell the person we are sorry for the specific way we hurt him /her (unless bringing up the issue will cause the person more harm);..... share regret...Not Attached To Outcome...Art of Timing—too soon/late.
6. Ask the person what we can do to make up the harm we have done.
7. Confirm that we will do our best to never repeat that harm to him or her or to others.

### **Conclusion**

Apologizing (making amends) can go a long way in restoring one’s sense of personal integrity, by doing the right thing. Apologizing can also heal one’s sense of guilt and shame for the mistake or harm done. Apologizing may also lead to healing the relationship: some relationships become stronger than ever when honest amends are made.

*“The most common cause of a failed - or avoided - apology is the offender’s pride. It’s the fear of shame. To apologize, you have to acknowledge that you...failed to live up to values like sensitivity, thoughtfulness, fairness, and honesty...An apology is a show of strength...an act of generosity.”*

**Dr. Aaron Lazare**