

How to Accept an Apology

Empowering Victims and Educating Aggressors

By Josh Schiering, Vice President of LINX, trainer, and lifelong advocate for building bully free environments

More than 95% of the time, the response to an apology is, "It's okay." Go ahead, test it out for yourself. Even as adults, we tell *Aggressors*, "It's okay." Why do you suppose we do this?

Some answers are that it's quick, easy, and we believe we can all move forward. But, here are a few questions to ask ourselves:

- What do we learn from the quick and easy way out?
- What do we teach others about how to treat us in the future?
- Was the act committed against us truly "okay," and if it wasn't, then
- Why do we tell the *Apologizer* that it was okay?

APOLOGY (*noun: a-pol-o-gy*)

An acknowledgment expressing regret or asking pardon for a fault or offense.

Examples:

1) "We owe you an apology."

2) "My apologies for the delay."

3) "I make no apologies for supporting that policy."

synonyms: expression of regret, one's regrets

The quick, "It's okay" is counter productive to our goal of *empowering the victim and educating the aggressor*. It sweeps the issues under the rug. It might toughen up our skin for the next time, but what we really learned is to just 'lookout' for that person in the future. We learned not to trust *that* aggressor. We learned to hide our true feelings and not stand up for ourselves.

Children are often "told" or "forced" to apologize by adults who do not take the time to truly process what has transpired. People often need time to process what was done to them, what was said to them and how it made them feel. Rushing into a quick apology and a quick acceptance of the apology is a BIG mistake.

I once had two campers, Johnny and Timmy. They got in an argument when Johnny ripped a Buzz Lightyear figurine out of Timmy's hand while saying, "Give it to me dummy!" Well I immediately swooped in and made Johnny give back the toy and **apologize at once!** Regrettably, moments later, the boys were at it again. Johnny learned nothing from the "forced" apology and Timmy was not equipped with the tools to stand-up for himself, as he wept in sorrow for being overpowered, yet again.

Lesson Learned: We must take our time when it comes to *sincere* apology giving and receiving.

SINCERE (*Adjective: sin-cere*)

Free from pretense or deceit; proceeding from genuine feelings.:

Example: "They offer their sincere apology to Lisa and Johnny."

Synonyms: heartfelt, wholehearted, profound, deep

EMPOWER THE VICTIM

The Apology Training Worksheet (below) teaches us how to **empower the victim while educating the aggressor**. The training is designed to establish the tone for the group and creates an environment of support, responsibility and accountability for one's actions. Admittedly, it takes a lot more time than the conventional method of facilitating a quick apology, but in the long run, the benefits outway the investment of initial time by a factor of 100.

ACCEPT THESE COMMENTS AS FACTS

- Acts of meanness and bullying are to be treated as seriously as, and at times more seriously than, a physical act of aggression
- While children are capable of amazing things, they can also:
 - Be mean
 - Hurt feelings
 - Cause each other to cry
 - Make someone not want to go to school or camp
 - Make people feel like they just don't belong

** Please note that adults are capable of these acts as well. As people, and most importantly, as educators, we are also capable of doing the complete opposite!*

THE APOLOGY TRAINING WORKSHEET

Listed below is a sample interaction between two children with a camp counselor assisting along the way (counselor could easily be a parent, teacher, bus driver, lunch supervisor, etc.). This scenario can be applied to any situation, at any age.

SCENARIO

Johnny told Lisa that he didn't want to be friends with her because she was "gross." The Facilitator observes the situation and has the two campers step away from the group. While kneeling down to the height of the campers to make eye contact and to not appear intimidating by looking down, he reviews what took place.

Facilitator:	Johnny, do you have something to say to Lisa?
Johnny:	I'm sorry.
Facilitator:	Johnny, please look Lisa in the eyes when you apologize. Please try it again and say what you are sorry for...
Johnny:	I'm sorry for saying you were gross (this time making eye contact)
Facilitator:	What do you say, Lisa? (knowing that 99% of the time the child will respond with, "It's okay")
Lisa:	It's okay.
< here comes the training >	
Facilitator to Lisa:	But was it okay, Lisa?
Lisa:	No. (Get her to acknowledge that it wasn't okay.)
Facilitator to Lisa:	If you forgive Johnny, let him know you forgive him, but let's also share why it wasn't okay.
Lisa:	I forgive you, but it wasn't okay.
Facilitator to Lisa:	Now let's tell him why it wasn't okay.
<p><i>The Facilitator now works with Lisa to help identify and articulate reasons why the aggressor's actions were not okay (i.e. it was mean, hurtful and made me sad). Then, the Facilitator guides Lisa to say the following...</i></p>	
Lisa:	It wasn't okay to do that to me because I am a person and you hurt my feelings with your

	words. I don't deserve that and it's not okay to be mean to me. Please don't do it again.
Johnny (with assistance from Counselor):	I am sorry and I will not do it again. You are right you do not deserve to be spoken to that way.
Facilitator:	<p>I am very proud of both of you. Lisa, you did a great job sticking up for yourself. You never have to let people be mean to you.</p> <p>Johnny, though you were mean, you apologized and took responsibility for your actions. I know you heard Lisa and now know that you cannot treat her that way again. I don't want you to treat anyone like that (Facilitator would ask Johnny how he would like it if he was treated that way, etc...).</p> <p>Now, let's work together, be nice to one another and work to earn our group the Spirit Stick today. Campers agree, high five or shake hands and return to the group.</p>

IMMEDIATE RESULTS

- Empowered children who can trust adults and now have the support needed to stand up for themselves and who know justice has been served
- Creation of an environment in which the *Aggressors* knows that the institution and the adults and children involved will not tolerate this behavior
- *Victims* and *Aggressors* who now have the words to use the next time this type of situation arises

LONG TERM RESULTS

- More confident children who know how to stand up for themselves
- Children who can trust their adult role models to be there for them
- Children who respect others and themselves
- Team players focused on working together towards a common goal (being kind to others and earning positive reinforcement established by the leader)

FOLLOW-THROUGH

The last steps include circling back to the children later in the day and week to make sure everyone is being respectful and supporting one another. Parents of both children may be contacted, as necessary, to inform them of the situation, how it was handled, and how it progressed for each child. Parent conferences might be required as well depending on the severity of the situation.

STAFF TRAINING

Here is a great way to break the ice leading into this training session:

Circle your team up (up to 30 at a time) and have a staff member sitting next to you who is holding a piece of paper (perhaps a paper you handed out). As everyone is settling into their seats, and the

attention is now on you as the facilitator, harshly grab the paper from the person next to you, while saying aggressively, "GIVE ME THAT!" You will get everyone's attention really quickly. Then, look to the person and hand them back the paper and say, "I'm sorry, my bad." The person will surely reply, "It's okay." You can then launch into the training by asking them, "Was it okay?... Was it really?" Enjoy the rest of the training by using volunteers to role-play the scenario above.

PARENT TRAINING

It's easy for moms, dads and caregivers to make use of this training. You do not need a formal sit down, just do it and watch what happens! It takes all of about three-minutes (typically). Be consistent and do it the same way each time. Eventually, you will be able to ask leading questions and they will start to do it on their own. Trust me, it works!

A TYPICAL TEEN IN ACTION

I recently got a call from my son's teacher about his misbehavior in class. My son, age 13, was not excited when I called for a meeting between him and the teacher. We went into the school together and his mood was, well, as you can guess, not enthusiastic. We sat down with his teacher and I quickly shifted into the role of facilitator. I asked if she could explain for Jake, what it was that he did wrong so he could hear it directly from her (previously he only heard about his being disrespectful in class through the email I shared with him). Keep in mind that my son was dumbfounded by the charges and felt attacked and singled out, when surely there were others who had done worse (common reaction by teens). Of course, I explained to my son that I did not care about the actions of the others in his class and that he **MUST** own his decisions and be prepared to face the consequences and make it right.

After Jake's teacher explained his behavior and how it was counter productive for the class objectives, he digested what was shared and we slower worked to get the apology out of him. Now I did not give his teacher a chance to say "it's okay," as she was starting to mutter those words once he initially simply said, "I am sorry," but I had him continue. I prodded him (with words and a few nods of my head) and instructed him to answer: "Why was it not okay to do that? Will you do it again going forward? Why won't you do it again and what does your teacher deserve?" I then asked him if he was capable of doing what was right, and if he would commit to making good decisions that he could be proud of. Well, Jake cried (I think mostly because of embarrassment), but he got through it and the teacher said she appreciated the apology and his owning his actions.

Jakes' report card came out a month later and his teacher's comment was that he had shown improvement in class (behaviorally). I recently sent an email to the teacher (2 months later) to see how he was doing, and she reported that his work and behavior were terrific. A little training can go a long way, and in this case, the fear of embarrassment and being held accountable for bad actions, I suspect, helped get my son back on the right path.

By the way, I have to share that when I got the email about my son being rude and disrespectful in class, I was appalled! I was even more appalled when he tried to deflect the behaviors and decisions he made to his friends. I thought, "MY SON DID WHAT?!!!" Then he played the, "I didn't do anything card." Well that was when I knew I had to have a face-to-face meeting with the teacher. Had he owned up to it right away, he might of gotten away with simply writing a sincere apology card (a tool I use for campers as young as 3 year old).

APOLOGY CARDS

Apology Cards are a great technique to use at home and school to get aggressors to reflect on their

actions. Instead of the quick apology, remove the aggressor from the situation and have them take the time to reflect on what they did. Younger children can draw a picture and dictate the written apology to the adult, while older children (1st grade and up) can write the apology themselves (pictures can also be included and in some cases an art project can also be made - helps with tactile learners who need to use their hands). After the "timeout/apology card" time is up, the aggressor delivers the note and apologize face-to-face. Doing this really makes the aggressor take the necessary time to reflect and consider the victim's feelings. It also enables the facilitator to assess the situation and determine if parent interaction is needed (if there is no remorse I typically send the child home for the day and require an in person meeting with parent and child the next morning). See *sample Apology Cards below*.

SAMPLE APOLOGY CARDS

From 7 year old Landyn



From 9 year old Marina



For more on how to use the Apology Training or to learn how to create a positive work environment contact Josh Schiering at jschiering@linx-usa.com. You can learn about how to **Eradicate Bullying** by visiting www.linxcamps.com.