

ANATOMY OF AN APOLOGY

Handout

Some of the elements of a genuine apology are:

- 1. The apology should acknowledge responsibility.**
The person making the apology needs to take responsibility for having done something wrong. It is an effort to right the balance between the offender and the offended. For example, saying, "I'm sorry that you're upset by what I said," is not taking responsibility for your actions and blames the other person for the upset.
- 2. The apology should be specific. It names the mistake that caused the harm.**
It is more than saying, "I'm sorry for what I did." It identifies the error that you've made. Generalities will not do.
- 3. The apology should express how the mistake hurt the other person.**
It should let the other person know that you understand their feelings. It should express some empathy for the other person. "I understand you were really worried that something might have happened to me when I was an hour late for dinner."
- 4. The apology may involve regret and guilt.**
The apology needs to express remorse. A real apology involves pain, suffering and soul-searching regret. It may express your concern that you have harmed your relationship and that you value the relationship.
- 5. The apology should express a willingness to change behaviour.**
It lets others know that the mistake will not occur again. Sometimes some sort of restitution is called for. One way of handling this would be to say, "Let me know if there is anything I can do." Or if you broke something of value, you can offer to replace it.
- 6. If the offence was public the apology should also be public.**
It is not fair to offend somebody publicly and then make an apology in private.

Most of all, an apology is a willingness to let go of the ego and treat another person with respect. It is an expression of honesty. It is a sign of strength rather than a sign of weakness.