

Apologies & Forgiveness in Marriage



By Julie Baumgardner, MS, CFLE

A few years ago, my husband and I were at an event. He was being his usual comical self. In the midst of conversation he made a remark that offended me. I'm pretty certain it wasn't intentional, but it still hurt my feelings. When I brought it to his attention, he kind of laughed and said he didn't mean anything by it. I explained that even though he didn't mean anything by it, it embarrassed me and I would appreciate it if in the future he would not make comments like that. I think at that point he clued in that he really had hurt my feelings. He said he was sorry and assured me he would not make that comment again. And, he hasn't.

If you have been married for any length of time, chances are good that your spouse has done something to offend you. How you bring the offense to your spouse's attention and how he/she responds has the potential to build up your marriage or tear it apart. All of us have different expectations when it comes to acknowledging a wrong, apologizing, and forgiveness.

In the business world they say that perception is reality. I think the same is true in marriage. Two people can experience the same thing and walk away with two totally different perspectives of what actually happened. Learning how to listen to your spouse's perspective, and even if you don't see things the same way, being willing to apologize for the part you may have played in the situation (see more about this on the next page) will go a long way toward enhancing your marriage relationship.

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Sorry +

What is an Apology?

Understanding the 5 Languages of Apology

Most everybody can think of a time when their spouse did something hurtful. When the offense was brought up, maybe your spouse flippantly said, "I'm sorry" and moved on. Maybe he or she felt like an apology had been given – but you felt disrespected and more hurt.

So, what constitutes an apology? According to Dr. Gary Chapman, author of *The Five Languages of Apology*, it all depends. Chapman shares that most people are looking for specifics in an apology—and unless they hear it or recognize it, they don't trust it.

First and foremost, the person who has been hurt needs to know that the apology is *genuine*. An apology is about validating the other person's feelings when they have been hurt or wronged. This is where pride can get in the way. According to Chapman, there are five languages of apology. When you understand which language your spouse speaks, it will help you start the process of forgiveness and reconnect as a couple. Here they are:



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1

Expressing regret. This is about acknowledging that you offended your spouse and expressing your own sense of guilt, shame, and pain that your behavior was hurtful. Actually being able to say "I am sorry" is very important to a person who speaks this language.

2

Accepting responsibility. An apology means accepting responsibility for your actions and being willing to say "I was wrong."

3

Making restitution. For an apology to be genuine to a person who speaks this language, they want acknowledgment of the wrongdoing and they want to know what you are going to do to make it right.

4

Genuinely repenting. If a person speaks this language, they are expecting that you not only apologize, but that you seek not to repeat the offense again in the future.

5

Requesting forgiveness. Combining the words "I am sorry" with a request for forgiveness is important to the spouse who speaks this language.