



“I’m Sorry—Just the Beginning



“Most adults try our best to stay in control, but now and then we “lose our cool” in front of children. For times like that, it can be really helpful for children to hear adults say, “I’m sorry.” - Fred Rogers

“I’m sorry” certainly is a powerful phrase – and an important one for interpersonal relationships, but how can we help children use it meaningfully? Fred Rogers wanted to help children learn that their actions affect others...and to work at fixing things (if possible) or at least work at repairing the relationship. When you think about it, those situations really are “teachable moments.” That’s why saying “I’m sorry” is just a beginning.

Create an environment that enhances effective interaction

When facilitating a dialogue between the child who did the action and the one who was affected by it, try to set up the conversation in an area that is somewhat away from other children. Help both children know it’s important to look right at each other. It will also be easier for you to mediate the conversation if you’re down at the children’s eye level, too. Eye contact and facial expressions help us convey that we’re genuinely sorry – and genuinely forgiving. Some children might dismiss the apology with, “Oh, that’s okay,” but let’s help them with a better response, like “Thanks for saying that.”

Help children put into words what they are sorry about

To make this “teachable moment” a learning experience, help children go beyond just saying “I’m sorry.” We need to help them tell the other child *what* they are sorry about – “I’m sorry I said something that wasn’t nice”...“I’m sorry I pushed you”...“I’m sorry I knocked over your block building.”

Just the beginning

We also need to help children put into words -- and tell the other child -- what they learned from the experience. What won’t they do again? “I won’t push...I won’t say mean words...I won’t knock over your blocks.” Even if a child’s words are as tenuous, such as “I’ll try not to do that again,” that’s a step in the right direction.

Be a role model

Children learn so much from watching how we handle situations. We all have moments when we need to say that we're sorry. Think about what it means to children when we adults can tell them we're sorry that we handled something wrong. First of all, it shows respect for children. Secondly, it makes it easier for them to say they're sorry, if they hear it from the important adults in their lives. And it lets them know what it feels like when someone is genuinely sorry. That's role-modeling. And it's powerful.

Saying "I'm sorry" is so much more than being polite or having manners. It's an important part of interpersonal relationships. And when you help children learn about offering apologies that are meaningful, you're helping them work on social skills that will help them all through school and through life.



Strategy Song: Saying I'm sorry is the first step. Then, how can I help?

This article is adapted from: The Fred Rogers Professional Development Newsletter, by Hedda Sharapan, January 2014.

Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood closely parallels the gentle tone and emphasis on social and emotional strategies that made *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* and Fred Rogers a TV icon. Fred's creativity and innovation continue to thrive in 21st century TV. Teachers and parents will enjoy revisiting his messages with a new generation of characters.