

Should You Force Your Child to Say “Sorry”?

We've all done it.

Our child hits a sibling, breaks something, or lashes out—and we respond, “Say sorry!” It feels like the right thing to do. We're trying to teach empathy and accountability.

But here's the problem: **forcing kids to apologise teaches them to lie.**

In [Season 1](#) of my Channel 9 hit TV show, *Parental Guidance*, I made this claim and stirred up national controversy. But let's unpack the truth behind it—and what to do instead.

Why Forced Apologies Often Backfire

Imagine being told to apologise when you're still angry, embarrassed, or feeling misunderstood. You say the words, but you don't mean them. That's exactly how kids feel. You spit those words across the room at the person. And guess what - they don't believe you, and you still feel aggrieved.

A forced apology doesn't build empathy or repair relationships—it can actually make things worse. It:

- Creates resentment, not remorse.
- Focuses the child on their own hurt rather than what they've done.
- Teaches compliance, not compassion.

So What Can We Do Instead?

Here's how to raise children who apologise sincerely—and learn to repair relationships in meaningful ways.

1. Give Kids Time and Space

When kids are upset, they're not in the right emotional state to reflect—let alone apologise. Instead of demanding instant remorse, try:

- “Let's take some time to cool off.”
- “I can see you're really upset. We'll talk when you're ready.”

This allows both sides to calm down and consider how to make things right.

2. Coach, Don't Coerce. Support, Don't Solve.

Ask questions that help your child reflect:

- “How do you think your sister felt?”
- “What could you do to help fix things?”
- “What do you think would make things better between you two?”

Support them through the repair process without demanding an immediate “sorry.”

3. Acknowledge Their Feelings Too

Often, kids resist apologising because they feel wronged too. Recognise their emotions first:

“It looks like you’re still really frustrated. Do you want to tell me what happened?”

When children feel heard, they’re more likely to consider the other person’s perspective.

4. Model What a Real Apology Looks Like

Children learn best by example. When you mess up, own it.

Try this 4-step apology:

1. **Say sorry.** (“I’m sorry.”)
2. **Name what you did.** (“Because I yelled at you.”)
3. **Acknowledge the impact.** (“I can see it made you feel scared.”)
4. **Ask for forgiveness.** (“Will you forgive me?”)

This shows your child how to take responsibility with humility and care. Teach this model and watch how sincere their apologies become. (And yours... it’s profoundly hard and humbling to ask “Will you forgive me”, and enormously freeing when they say “yes”.)

True Apologies Are Chosen, Not Forced

A coerced apology may check a box, but it doesn't change hearts.

Instead, let's help our kids:

- Reflect on their actions,
- Understand the impact,
- And feel safe enough to say sorry because they *mean it*.

Apologies are about *repair*, not *compliance*.

And like anything worthwhile in parenting, that takes time, patience, and modelling.

Try This at Home:

Next time your child hurts someone, pause. Don’t rush in with “Say sorry!” Instead, say:

“I know you’re upset. Let’s take a moment. Later, we can talk about how to make things right.”

You might be surprised at the heartfelt apology that comes *when they’re ready*.

To learn more, listen to [Episode #1043 of the Happy Families Podcast: Forcing Kids to Apologise](#).



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