

How To Apologize Learning Experience 25

[Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)

Grade Level Range: Middle School - Adult

To Teachers:

Before beginning, please make sure you have:

1. Read the Introduction to Teaching Healthy Relationships and Relationship Skills ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)) for suggestions on teaching SEL Skills, processing learning experiences, applying skills in real-life situations, and assessing, evaluating, and grading SEL Skills.
2. Taught students how to role-play, observe, coach, and give feedback; see the Role Playing, Coaching, Observing, & Giving Feedback Reading & Process ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)) for detailed information on how to set up and teach role-playing that uses students as coaches and observers (who provide feedback). In addition, see Observing Giving Feedback Skill Card ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#))
3. Read the How To Apologize Reading ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)), the How To Apologize Skill Card ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)), and the How To Apologize Observation Form ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)).

The purpose of this learning experience is to help students become skillful at apologizing when they are wrong and/or when they have said or done something hurtful. Many conflicts can be de-escalated, and some can be prevented if we apologize for making a mistake or hurting someone. Although not essential, it may be helpful if students are skillful in passive and active listening and using “I Statements” before facilitating this learning experience. If an apology brings up other hurts, misunderstandings, and/or real or imagined past transgressions, then students need to be skillful in having conflict resolution skills. See the Listening, “I Statements,” and Conflict Resolution readings and learning experiences for information on these skills.

Procedure/Directions For Teaching How To Apologize

1. Begin by asking students whether they apologize when they are wrong or say or do something hurtful. You could use the “Thumb Meter” instead of asking them outright. See “Processing Non-Verbally” in How To Teach SES Skills in the See “Processing Non-Verbally” in How To Teach SES Skills in the [How To Teach Social-Emotional Skills Module](#)
2. If you always apologize when you are wrong or say or do something hurtful, put your thumb straight up and turn it in a circle. If you almost always apologize when you are wrong or say or do something hurtful, put your thumb straight up. If you only apologize sometimes, put your palms parallel to the ground. If you hardly ever apologize, put your thumb down; if you never apologize, put your thumb down and turn it in a circle.

3. Ask volunteers to share why they don't apologize or apologize infrequently or if they apologize to some people but not others. Brainstorm a list of reasons why people don't apologize and suggest any additional reasons for the list. Title the list "Reasons Why People Don't Apologize." Consider compiling a list from all of your classes.
4. Ask volunteers to share why they almost always apologize or if they apologize to some people. Brainstorm a list of reasons why people apologize and suggest any additional reasons for the list. Title the list "Reasons Why People Apologize." Consider compiling a list from all of your classes.
5. Ask volunteers to share how they feel when someone else is wrong, or they say or do something hurtful and don't apologize. Ask them to share how it affects the relationship. Brainstorm a list of how people feel when someone has done something hurtful, and they don't apologize, and how it affects the relationship. Suggest any additional feelings and effects for the list. Title the list as the "Risks of Not Apologizing." Consider compiling a list from all of your classes.
6. Ask volunteers to share how their relationships are affected when others apologize to them and how they feel.
7. Ask for volunteers to share how their relationships are affected when they apologize and how they feel after they apologize. Brainstorm a list of how apologizing affects relationships. Suggest any additional feelings and effects for the list. Title the list as the "Benefits of Apologizing." Consider compiling a list from all of your classes.
8. Return to the list of why people don't apologize. Some reasons on the list may be false beliefs or assumptions like "being afraid of appearing weak" if you apologize. Ask students if these beliefs and assumptions are, in fact, true and have them develop counter statements about any false assumptions. For example: "Not only is someone not weak when they apologize, it takes courage and strength to admit when we are wrong or have hurt someone and to apologize." Some reasons why we and others don't apologize may be barriers holding us back. Brainstorm how they and others can overcome these barriers.
9. Have them pretend the following happens to them: Someone close to you says something very hurtful. You feel disappointed, hurt, and angry. Consider a time when someone did or said something that made you feel disappointed, hurt, and/or angry. You decide to let the person know how you are feeling, and you use an "I Statement" and say, "That hurts." I'm disappointed you would say something like that to me!

10. Have them now pretend that you are the person who said the hurtful thing to them. After they say, “That hurts and that they feel disappointed,” you respond in the following ways outlined below. Ask them how they think they would feel and why after each of these responses, whether they believe your apology is genuine, and why they think that way. Read each statement one at a time with a sense of righteousness, as if you are not taking responsibility for what you said or did.
 - “So, I don’t know why you are so upset.”
 - “What I said was no big deal.”
 - “You misinterpreted what I was saying”.
 - “I was just joking”.
 - “I understand that you are feeling disappointed, but...”
 - “I understand that you are feeling disappointed.”
 - “You seem to think...but you’d certainly agree that you...”
 - In an angry tone: “So why are you hurt?”
 - “Well, I’ve been hurt by you in the past.”
 - “Well, if you hadn’t said...I never would have said that.
 - “Well, I am sorry you are hurt by what I said.”
 - “Well, I’m sorry you feel that way.”
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11. Review, as we discussed previously, how it can be challenging to apologize because we may not want to admit that we are wrong or have done something hurtful. When confronted about something we have done, we may feel defensive. When we feel defensive, we may attack or try to deflect responsibility for what we have done or said. Or we may not know how to apologize. The responses outlined above are examples of going on the attack/deflecting responsibility.
12. Next, distribute a copy of the How To Apologize Reading ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)) and review “What To Avoid When Apologizing.” Ask them if they have any questions or concerns about the things to avoid.
13. Distribute the How To Apologize Skill Card ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)). Review the skills and demonstrate how to use them.
14. Divide the class into groups of 4.
15. Have each group brainstorm a list of things done and said to students their age that warrant an apology. Create a visible list. You may have them categorize by parents, siblings, friends, and people in dating relationships. When each group has completed their list, create a class list. Later, you may compile a list from all of your classes.
16. Using the list they generated, have them role-play using 1 of the 2 of the options below.

Two Options For Role Playing:

Depending on how much time you have, your students' developmental level, and how many examples of situations your students generate, there are 2 options for role-playing.

Option # 1:

In their groups, students make a decision on how to respond to each situation, and then volunteers from several groups role-play with you, and you provide feedback on their use of the skill. This option takes less time, and students do not need to be skillful observers, coaches, and at giving feedback.

Option # 2.

In their groups, students decide on how to respond to each situation and then role-play within their groups. Each group member will be able to role-play, be a coach, observer, and give feedback on what they observed. When students role-play in groups of four, one of the group members can be a coach, and one can observe and provide feedback (based on an observation /feedback form) to the student who is role-playing the skill. It is helpful to use student observers because they can collect more information and provide more feedback than teachers. In addition, when they observe skills using an observation/feedback form, they learn how to use the skill as they observe, and then when they provide feedback using the definition of the skill in their feedback. It is important to rotate the coaching and the observing/giving feedback roles since it has been demonstrated that students who have observed/given feedback and coached others are better at using the skill than those who have not observed and coached. In addition, you can ask for volunteers from groups to role-play with you, and you can provide feedback on their use of the skill. For more information on the importance of having students practice using the skills, coaching, observing, and giving feedback, see "How To Teach SES Skills" in the [How To Teach Social-Emotional Skills Module](#). See the *Observing & Giving Feedback Skill Card* ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)) for suggestions on how to give specific, detailed feedback.

Option # 1:

In their groups, have students decide how they would respond to the 2 situations outlined below. Provide them (one at a time) with the situations. Each group member needs to have a copy of the [How to Apologize Skill Card](#) ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)).

1. Have each group agree on how they will respond to the situation. It may be helpful to have them write out their responses. Each response should include inviting the person into the conversation, using an "I Statement" when apologizing, being specific about what was said or done or not done, saying how they will be in the future, and ending the conversation on a positive note.
2. After the group decides on a response, each member should say it aloud to their group to practice.
3. After they have developed each response, ask volunteers to role-play the situation with you (you are the recipient of the apology).

4. After each student role plays with you, provide them with feedback on how effective they were using each of the parts of an “apology statement” (using an “I Statement” when apologizing, being specific about what was said or done or not done, saying how they will be in the future, and ending the conversation on a positive note) and whether they avoided using any of “the statements to avoid when apologizing.” Also, tell them whether you believe their apology was genuine and whether you would accept it based on what they said. If you do not think their apology was genuine, share it with them as part of your feedback and tell them what made you feel it was not genuine.
5. When asking for volunteers to role-play with you, make sure that groups rotate the roles so that all students practice apologizing.
6. After role-playing the 2 situations below, use the examples from the list they generated (of things done and said to students their age that warrant an apology). Each group develops a complete apology statement (using “I Statements” describing specifically what they did or didn’t do, what they would say about how they will be in the future, and how they would end the conversation on a positive note). After each situation, role-play with volunteers from select groups and provide feedback on how well they used each part of the skill.
7. After each role-play, ask the class, by a show of hands, how likely they would be to accept the apology. Another option is to use the Thumb O Meter to generate their responses. See “Processing Non-Verbally” in [How To Teach SES Skills](#) in the [How To Teach Social-Emotional Skills Module](#).
8. After completing all the role-playing, bring the whole class back to process. Questions include:
 - What parts of apologizing did you use effectively, and what parts do you need to get better at or do more consistently?
 - Which parts of apologizing were easiest and why?
 - Which parts of apologizing were the most difficult and why?
 - Which parts of apologizing will be easiest to use in real life and why?
 - Which parts of apologizing will you have the most difficulty with when you use them in real life and why?
 - Use the Thumb O Meter to determine the extent to which they believe they will apologize to someone in the future. You may ask how likely they are to apologize to parents, siblings, friends, and people in dating relationships. Ask volunteers why they may be more likely to apologize to different groups and not others.

End with a discussion (or use the Thumb O Meter) about whether they believe they will now be more likely to apologize when they are wrong or have said or done something hurtful. If you think you will be much more likely to apologize in the future when you are wrong or say or do something hurtful, put your thumb straight up and turn it in a circle. If you will be more likely to apologize in the future when you are wrong or say or do something hurtful, put your thumb straight up. If you think you will be no more likely to apologize in the future, place your palm parallel to the ground. If you think you will be slightly less likely to apologize in the future, put your thumb down, and if you think it is not very likely that you will apologize in the future, put your thumb down and turn it in a circle. You may ask how likely they are to apologize to parents, siblings, friends, and people in dating relationships.

Ask for volunteers to share:

- Why are you either more or less likely to apologize in the future?
- For those who are now more likely to apologize now than when you started this lesson, why are you more likely to apologize now than before?
- Ask volunteers why they may be more likely to apologize to different groups and not others.
- By a show of hands, how many of you have someone in your life who deserves an apology from you? Ask volunteers to share who the person is and what you need to apologize for. See the [How To Apologize Project](#) below.

Role Playing Situations:

Situation # 1:

1. A friend of yours has been very moody and quiet around you. What would you say if you think they may be upset with you?
2. If they say: “No, why do you ask?” how would you respond?
3. If they say: “Yes, I am,” how would you respond if you are uncertain about why they are upset with you?
4. How would you respond if they said: “I was disappointed last week when you made fun of my clothes. I know you were only kidding, but it still hurt”.

Situation # 2:

1. You realize that you need to apologize for making fun of your friend’s clothes last week. You only meant it as a joke, but when you saw your friend’s expression, you realized they were probably upset by what you said. You wish you had apologized then.
2. How would you invite someone into a conversation when you want to apologize?
3. If, after you invite them into the conversation, your friend says, “Yes, now is a good time,” what’s up? How do you respond?

4. If, after you apologize, it seems like your friend may not have completely accepted your apology, what do you say to end the conversation on a positive note?

Option # 2: Procedure/Directions For Role Playing, Coaching, Observing, & Giving Feedback

1. Distribute copies of the How to Apologize Observation Form ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)) and the Observing & Giving Feedback Skill Card ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)).
2. Review the skills and demonstrate how to use them.
3. Explain that they will be role-playing, and they will have the opportunity to coach, observe, and give feedback.
4. Review the process for completing the observation form and the process for giving feedback on the Observing & Giving Feedback Skill Card ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)). Demonstrate how to give feedback.
5. Divide the class into groups of 4. Provide them with the following situation: You made fun of your friend's clothes a few days ago. You only meant it as a joke, but when you saw your friend's expression, you realized they probably were upset by what you said. You wished you would have apologized then. You decide to apologize. What do you say to your friend? Each response should include inviting the person into the conversation, using an "I Statement" when apologizing, being specific about what you said or did or didn't do, saying how you will be in the future, and ending the conversation on a positive note.
6. Have each group develop their response. It may be helpful to have them write their response.
7. Ask several groups to volunteer to role-play the person apologizing to you. The group selects one person to role-play while the others sit next to the person apologizing to coach them. If and only if the person apologizing gets stuck, can another group member offer suggestions? All students who are role-playing should use their copy of the How to Apologize Skill Card (to help them successfully use the skill). Have the rest of the class observe using the "How to Apologize Observation Form to give them practice observing.
8. After each role-play, ask for volunteers from the observers to provide feedback using the process outlined on the Observing & Giving Feedback Skill Card, ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)) including asking the person being assertive what they did well and what they need to do better next time. Provide feedback to the observer regarding how well they provided feedback. This process allows them to practice observing, giving feedback, and for everyone to hear your feedback on giving feedback
9. Have several groups repeat this process of role-playing, the person being assertive with you. At the same time, the rest of the class observes, and volunteer observers provide feedback after each role-play. After each volunteer provides feedback to each observer, you provide feedback on how well the provided feedback.
10. Use the same process for Situation # 1 above.

Role Playing The Skills In Small Groups

1. Provide them (one at a time) with the situations they generated about things said or done to students their age that warrant an apology.
2. Have each group agree on how they will respond to each situation. It may be helpful to have them write out their responses.
3. After they develop each response, they take turns role-playing in their groups. One person will role-play the person apologizing, a second person will be the recipient of the apology, the third person will observe and complete the Observation Form, and the fourth person will coach the person who is role-playing if and only if they get stuck. The coach's primary role is to note what worked well, what didn't, and what, if anything, they would have done differently.
4. Each group member will have the opportunity to play the role of the person apologizing, the person receiving the apology, coach, observe, and give feedback.
5. All students who are role-playing should use their copy of the "How to Apologize Skill Card to help them successfully use the skill.
6. The observer completes the How To Apologize Observation Form ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)) for the person who is apologizing.
7. After each role-play, the observer provides feedback using the process outlined on the Observing & Giving Feedback Skill Card, ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#))including asking the person what they did well and what they need to do better next time.
8. The observer should also ask the person receiving the apology how likely they would accept it and why.
9. Next, they are to switch roles, with the person apologizing now becoming the recipient of the apology, and the observer and coach switch roles.
10. After each role-play, repeat the process of the observer providing feedback, asking what they did well, what they need to do to improve, and asking the person receiving the apology how likely they would be to accept the apology and why.
11. While small groups are role-playing, you can circulate to gather information about students' competency in apologizing, coaching, observing, and giving feedback. When walking around, you can intervene to improve effectiveness, correct misunderstandings and misconceptions about the use of the skill, and reinforce the appropriate and competent use of the skills. You will need to decide whether to intervene with a specific group or wait and process with the entire class. The information you gather will help you determine if you need to reteach and role-play how to use the skills or if a simple reminder will suffice.

12. After each group has completed all the role-playing situations, bring the whole class back to process. Questions include:

- What parts of apologizing did you use effectively, and what skills do you need to improve or do more consistently?
- Which parts of apologizing were easiest and why?
- What parts of apologizing were the most difficult and why?
- What parts of apologizing will be easiest to use in real life and why?
- What parts of apologizing will you have the most difficulty with when you use them in real life and why?
- What was it like to give feedback?
- What was it like to receive feedback?
- Was it easier or more challenging to give feedback or receive it? Why?
- What would make it easier to receive feedback?
- What would make it easier to give feedback?

End with a discussion about whether they will be more likely to apologize when they are wrong or have done something hurtful. You could again use the “Thumb’ O Meter.” If they think they will be much more likely to apologize in the future when they are wrong or say or do something hurtful, they put their thumb straight up and turn it in a circle. If they think they will be somewhat more likely to apologize in the future when they are wrong or say or do something hurtful, they put their thumb straight up. If they think they will be no more likely to apologize in the future, they put their palms parallel to the ground. If they think they will be slightly less likely to apologize in the future, they put their thumb down, and if they think it is highly unlikely that they will apologize in the future, they put their thumb down and turn it in a circle. Ask for volunteers to share:

- Why are they more or less likely to apologize in the future?
- For those who are now more likely to apologize than when you started this lesson, why are they more likely to apologize now than before?
- By a show of hands, how many of them have someone who deserves an apology from them
- Ask volunteers to share who the person is and what they must apologize for. See the [How To Apologize Project](#) below.

Assessment & Grading

Evaluating students' ability to apologize is one of the easier social-emotional skills to grade. You can give a test/quiz by providing situations and having students write their responses as if they were preparing for and offering an apology. They would need to include the following:

- What would they say if they sensed the person was angry with them but were unsure?
- What they would say when inviting the person into the conversation.
- A complete apology that includes an "I Statement" regarding how they feel, what they specifically said or did or did not do, and how they will be in the future regarding the situation.
- How would they end the conversation on a positive note?

Recommended Follow-Up

1. To become proficient, students will need more time using these skills. It is suggested that beginning and ending minutes be used to practice this skill throughout the year. For example, students could pair up with someone sitting beside them. Describe a situation that warrants an apology and have each group develop a complete apology response. Ask for volunteers or randomly call on students to role-play the situation with you. Provide feedback.
2. Periodically ask students how they are doing regarding apologizing and what the consequences have been for either apologizing or not apologizing. Focus on what worked and didn't, and ask them what they need to do to improve.

Follow-Up Learning Experiences: Applying Relationship Skills In Real Life Situations

It is not enough to have students only use skills in class. They must be given opportunities to apply skills in real life outside of class. The process of using skills in real-life situations, processing the results, and modifying their response is necessary and must be continuous and ongoing.

Follow-Up Projects For Apologizing in Real-Life Situations

1. Students develop a goal to apologize more often using the My Goals Log LE and the My Goals Log ([SES Projects Module](#)). Using the My Goals Log allows students to change their behavior and develop goals that do not require much analysis or the exploration of alternatives and choices. The My Goals Log can be used to have students develop goals and evaluate their success at the midpoint and again at the end of the project.

2. Using the How To Apologize Project ([SES Projects Module](#)) have students develop a goal to be more effective in apologizing when they are wrong or have done or said something hurtful. For those students who raised their hands above (they have someone who deserves an apology from them), they may develop a goal to apologize to that person. Everyone else who does not have someone who deserves an apology can now wait until they need to apologize and do it later. For those students who will not be doing the project now, it is important that they keep the My Goal To Apologize in a place where they can find it, and equally vital that you remind them weekly that they need to complete it at some point.