The Apology Cheat Sheet

What to say when you've hurt someone, and what to do next.

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Women. Couples. Teens. Groups

Think of one moment you want to come back to. Ask if now is a good time to talk, and listen long enough to understand how it landed. Then use these steps in your own words.

1. **Name what you did.**
   Be specific about your part. "I made a joke about you in front of our friends."

2. **Show that you understand what hurt.**
   Say what makes sense about their response, and check whether you have it right. "When everyone laughed, I can see why you felt put on the spot. Am I getting that right?"

3. **Apologize for the impact.**
   Say what you're sorry for and what you wish you'd done differently. "I'm sorry I put you on the spot. I wish I'd brought it up privately."

4. **Offer one way to make amends.**
   Offer something you can do about the hurt now. Ask before taking a step that affects them. "Would you like me to clear it up with them, or would that make things worse?"

5. **Make the change visible.**
   Say what you'll do differently and follow through without being reminded. "If I'm frustrated about something between us, I'll bring it up with you in private."

6. **Leave room for their response.**
   Let them correct you, say more, or take time. "You don't have to answer now. If there's more you want me to understand, I'm here to listen."

They may still be hurt. They may need more time, and the apology itself may not repair what happened. They don't owe you forgiveness, even if you meant every word. Keep doing what you said you'd do without asking them to reassure you or move on.

If you hear yourself saying "I was only joking…" Try "I'm starting to explain myself. Let me come back to what hurt." You can talk about what you meant later, if it would help.

Before you talk, jot down the two things you most want to get right:

What I'm sorry for: _____

What I'll do differently: _____

Want more practice working through moments like this?

In Week 6 of my course, we work on taking responsibility, making amends, and following through without asking your partner to move on before they're ready.

Explore Building Trust & Connection • Coming soon

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