



Nurturing Believers Solutions

Situation # 2

How do I make my child say sorry?



Tagged: Behaviour, 3-12 years

Before answering this question, let us examine the question itself. Please understand that when our child makes a mistake, **it is not enough to make him say sorry, our goal must be to make him feel sorry**. There is a huge and very significant difference between these two.



When our child does something wrong, we usually insist that he apologizes immediately, threatening him with punishment if he doesn't, or promising reward if he does ("*Say sorry right now or else...*", "*If you say sorry I'll let you go*"). The child is likely to comply and say sorry just to get out of trouble and avoid punishment, or to make you happy and reap the rewards of his apology.

If he does not say sorry immediately and is punished as a result, and then comes back and apologizes, parents feel like they have succeeded in teaching their child a lesson. However, in reality, all the child has learned is a way to end the punishment and nothing else. Even though he may **say** sorry,







- The child may not understand that what he did was wrong
- He may think he was justified in doing what he did and doesn't think he deserves punishment
- He may realize that what he did was wrong, but doesn't care about the consequences

Remember that every mistake our child makes is a valuable opportunity to do *tarbiyah*. If we waste it by settling for a mere verbal apology, we fail to make our child

- Understand the difference between right and wrong
- Understand the negative consequences of his actions
- Develop a sense of responsibility for his actions
- Feel remorse for the harm that he may have caused

As a result, it is likely that our child will repeat the wrong behavior, if not in front of us, then surely behind our backs. Furthermore, by insisting on verbal apology, irrespective of whether he really feels remorse or not, we give the child the message that it's okay to say something even if we don't mean it, and with this **we sow the seeds of hypocrisy in our child**.

SO, WHAT THEN IS THE SOLUTION?

	First, control your own anger and consider the child's mistake as a teaching opportunity. <i>Focus on his learning rather than venting your own emotions.</i>
	Second, calmly ask your child if he thinks what he did was wrong. <u>If he says no</u> , discuss in detail all the negative consequences of his actions . E.g. if he kicked a ball in your living room (after you had told him not to!) and broke your favorite vase, explain to him that the vase cost a lot of money and you had saved up for a long time in order to buy it, or that it was a gift from deceased father and was very special to you, or that his father bought it for you from another country and it was unlikely that he will be able to go there again to buy a new piece. Give him analogies of experiences he can relate to in order to make him fully understand, e.g ask him how he would feel if someone broke his favorite toy or some other treasured item. <u>If he says yes</u> , ask him very patiently why he did it if he knew it was wrong. <i>You might discover that your child has some deep seated grievance or resentment because of which he is acting out, and this discussion could lead towards resolving the root cause of his disobedience or misbehavior.</i>
	Third, in case of either of the above responses, explain to him how you, or others affected by his behavior, feel as a result . E.g. tell him that you are sad that the vase broke because it was something you liked very much, and that his father will also be sad because he bought it from so far away. Also tell him, where he explicitly disobeyed you, how disappointed you are at his disobedience. You can also add how unhappy (NOT angry) Allah (swt) must be with him (for hurting someone, or wasting <i>rizq</i> , or disobeying parents etc.). <i>Expressing sadness and disappointment is likely to arouse feelings of remorse, whereas expressing anger will make him defensive.</i>
	Fourth, do NOT tell the child to <i>say sorry</i> . Give him time to think about what you have discussed with him, reminding him once in a while about how sad you are feeling, and being less warm and affectionate than usual. Infact, if he says sorry, tell him that you are in no hurry for a verbal apology, because what matters to you is that he realizes and truly regrets what he has done, and that he can take his time to think about it and come back to you when he truly feels sorry. When it seems like he is earnest in his apology, ask him what being sorry means. Make sure he understands <i>why</i> what he did was wrong, and that being sorry means that one does not repeat the same behavior again.
	Fifth, discuss with him ways to compensate for his mistake other than just saying sorry and encourage him to act on them. This could include doing <i>istighfar</i> , apologizing to someone and giving them a small gift to make them feel better, using his pocket money to replace what he has broken (you could pitch in to help him with this so he is not discouraged from it!).
	Sixth, at the end, make sure to hug him and tell him that you are really happy because he has realized his mistake, and truly regrets it, and has tried to make up for it.

REMEMBER!!!

As a mother, you need to be comfortable expressing remorse for your mistakes in front of your child in order for your child to learn to do so as well. Whether you have yelled at your child undeservedly, or broken a promise, or accused him wrongfully, be honest in admitting your mistake, explaining why you think what you did was wrong, and apologizing and making up for it. Your child will respect you for it, and follow your example.

To be continued...