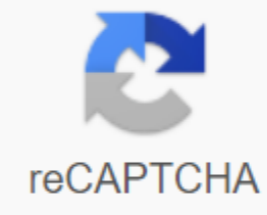




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For love! I thought of myself in anger. Why doesn't he just leave it? We drove for too long, she was hungry and I had read her the wrong directions—as I'm prone to do—and we lost our turn. It was an honest mistake, and I didn't understand why an apology was still necessary in the first place. My sister and I are best friends, but we've been in this situation too many times before -- usually when we drive together in reality. He just wishes I'd say I'm sorry and done with it, and I insist that I said I'm sorry (but that it wasn't really my fault anyway). She leaves hurt and I leave disappointed. For me, I felt like we were speaking two completely different languages. Looks like I found something. Recently came in a book called The Five Languages of Apology by Dr. Gary Chapman and Jennifer Thomas-the same Dr. Chapman who gave us the 5 Languages of Love. In the 5 Languages of Love, Chapman explains that there are five languages (confirmation words, natural touch, gift giving, acts of service and quality time) to communicate our love. While we all appreciate every language of love, each of us feels more loved with gestures in just one (or maybe two) of these categories. Similarly, in the five languages of apology (the update is called When Sorry Isn't Enough), we learn that there are five languages of apology and everyone receives the most sincere apology when a main language is spoken. According to Chapman and Thomas, the five languages of apology are: regretting the restoration of the restoration that repents forgiveness For many of us, there is a main language of apology that is the most important. In my sister's case, I accepted responsibility, but what she really wanted was to express my regret. You see, all this time my sister and I have been speaking two different languages. It's time to learn the five languages of apology and learn to speak each one fluently. Let us also pay special attention to this primary language that speaks to our loved ones and to us. Expressing regret For most people, an apology is not really an apology unless you hear the words I'm sorry. For many of us, to truly forgive, we must see that the person who hurt us regrets what he has done. This is the most important of the elements of an apology, but some people feel it more strongly than others.02 Acceptance of responsibility We can all find good reasons and explanations for why we behave badly. He was pushing my buttons. I was late. He hurt me. Whatever the reason, it doesn't change the fact that what we did was wrong or bad to another person. While this element of apology is similar to expressing regret, many of us also very much need to listen to the acceptance of Someone might say I'm sorry I hurt you, but in many cases it's important for us to take responsibility for the fact that it caused the harm too. I. I. wrong to call you, or I'm sorry I stretched out while navigating? this was my fault, sometimes expresses the most sincerity.03. Making Re(…) A Chapman and Thomas explain in their book, sometimes just expressing regret and taking responsibility for our actions is not good enough. Sometimes we have to make a recovery to make an apology honest. An excellent example is when a child scans a toy from another child. We're not just encouraging the kid to apologize. We also encourage the child to return the stolen toy. But when it hurts a family member, a friend, or spouses feelings, recovery is not about returning something that was stolen, it's about reassuring the other person they love. Chapman and Thomas explain that the damage of an angry word or betrayal is that we believe that if that person really loved us, they wouldn't have done that. In this case, Chapman and Thomas propose that we rely on the five languages of love to make a recovery by ensuring the injured man our love for them.04 Truly repenting Chapman and Thomas remind us that the word repentance means turning around or changing one's mind. An apology loses its sincerity if you give your loved one no assurance that you will try not to make the same mistake again. For some of us, and perhaps depending on the seriousness of the offense, a sincere apology requires that the person verbally desire to never harm you in this way again. We all know that bad habits can be hard to break, but Chapman and Thomas suggest that in addition to telling your loved one that you want to change, you make a plan to ensure success.05 Asking Forgiveness This last element of an apology may be the hardest, but for many people it is also the most important. Asking that someone free you from the guilt of your offense is a powerful thing and will eventually free both people. Chapman and Thomas explain that asking for forgiveness is difficult for the worm, because it means relinquishing control of the fate of the relationship, it means accepting the possibility of rejection, and that means admitting failure. Likewise, it is difficult for many of us to forgive, because it can often mean relinquishing our sense of justice. But, despite the difficulty, actually saying the words Will you forgive me? has proven for many people to be the secret to healing and renewing the relationship. Many of us have seen significant improvement in our relationships thanks to Chapman's love languages. I know that I, for one, can't wait to put these languages sorry for the good use as well. Photo Credit: Taylor McCutchan sorry on the back of my magazine that I never sent. I wrote it to someone who left me after almost nine years of friendship. Our break was nothing like the little, gossipy struggles I had in childhood, or even the slow drifting apart so common in adulthood. Instead, it only happened one day, suddenly as a lightning strike. Or at least it seemed that way. So. He may have heard lightning from miles away, but I'll never know. I recently asked another friend if I should send the letter, or at least a text-some kind of signal that the door was still open on my side, that I wanted to do things right or at least get some closure. But it wisely reminded me that it wasn't my job to appeal my friend's decision, it was my job to respect it. So am I. But that doesn't mean I haven't spent many nights playing the ending back in my head, trying to see our disagreement from their point of view, putting more compassionate words in my mouth, trying to make everything go well. How could I be their best friend? What could I do to show them how much I care? When exploring the question, I came across the lesser known brother of love languages: apology languages. According to Dr. Gary Chapman and Jennifer Thomas, the creators of both, there are different ways to say I'm sorry, as there are different ways of saying I love you. And each of us can demand different words and deeds to heal when we have wronged ourselves. Understanding the languages of love and trust in our relationships is vital to keeping them healthy, and knowing the best way to apologize is just as important. Although not directly related to love languages, the five languages of apology have offered me clues as to how to approach relationship repair. Often a sincere apology will contain more than one of these languages, so it can be helpful to gain fluency in at least some. (There are worse things to be than an emotional polyglot.) Expressing regret The first apology language described by Chapman and Thomas is the act of saying (or writing) the words I'm sorry. It may seem, at first glance, too rudimentary to be characterized as language (it did it for me), but they say that the impact of a simple, direct apology should not be underestimated. Saying I'm sorry comes easier to some than others, and the need to hear it can vary too. In some cases, an apology like this is all it takes, but in others it needs to be combined with different languages to be effective. For example, trying to rehabilitate, another language without offering an apology can often hit hollow or make someone feel like you're trying to buy their forgiveness while saying you're sorry for something without accepting responsibility or trying to correct the mistake may not be enough. It might sound like... I have to apologize for the way I ignored your suggestions, I wish I was a better listener. Accepting responsibility In this language of apology, it is important for the apologist to directly the impact their actions and words have had on the person they have wronged, rather than making a series of excuses or blaming the circumstances. This can be as simple as changing, I'm so sorry I'm late, the traffic was nuts and I couldn't find parking! to I'm so sorry you had to wait for me-I should have left earlier to get picked up Or it can be as subtle as acknowledging that the abuses committed against you don't give you free permission to commit the same to others. The key is to make sure that the burden of apology remains with the one who apologizes--don't make the mistake of creating distance with wording like, I'm sorry you feel that way when what really needs to be said is, I'm sorry I made you feel that way. It might sound like... I know that when I yell like that, I repeat patterns I learned when I was a kid, but I don't want to treat you like that. I have to work to find better outlets for my anger so I don't upset you. Recovery can be complicated, especially since it often involves placing a relative value on something after it has been destroyed. A borrowed dress ruined by melted lipstick in the dryer may be easy to quantify, but when it comes to, say, trust broken by an affair, it becomes more complicated. Regardless of the scale, this apology language is all about finding a way to get it right. Often this manifests itself in matching the scale of the apology with the initial error-if a colleague throws you under the bus during a meeting, a private apology from them may not be enough. It is important to note that in some cases, it is not really possible to fully balance the scales, or that making the promise to do so may take time. But for those whose apology language is based around rehabilitation (I much included), there is no substitute for a good faith effort to repair and rebuild. It might sound like... Thank you for taking care of me when I got really drunk at the concert last night. I'm sorry you couldn't relax and enjoy it because of me. I'd love to take you to another show, my treat, and make it up to you. Truly repenting For this language sorry, the key element is changing behavior. Not only must the apologist acknowledge the mistake of what he did, but he must accompany this recognition with a plan to avoid the same mistake in the future. For something like forgetting birthdays, this can include telling your friend that you put a recurring event in your calendar for a week in advance to ensure that you never forget them again, or in more serious contexts, can take the form of significant lifestyle changes, such as taking steps toward sobriety , cancel a credit card, or practice someone's pronouns before you see them to get it right. Where rehabilitation is about defining the past, repentance is about working to change the future. In other words: What are you going to do to That this won't happen again? It might sound like... I want you to know that I feel terrible about how I treated you years ago when you came to me. I didn't know anything better at the time, but I know now that my ignorance and assumptions were wrong and shit and hurtful. I'd like to rekindle our friendship if you give me a chance. Asking Forgiveness This Is Interesting To Me in my own emotional landscape, I have a difficult time understanding this as a language in itself. If someone has hurt me and wants me to forgive them, I would like to see them express it in other languages -- expressing regret, accepting responsibility, presenting a strong recovery plan, including plans for the future -- before considering it. (I'll admit writing that out makes me self-conscious about being high maintenance, but reading again like someone else wrote it, sounds reasonable.) But what resonates for me in Chapman's explanation of asking for forgiveness is that although apology (and accompanying rehabilitation and repentance) is the responsibility of the wronged, the power of forgiveness is solely at the discretion of the wronged party. Asking for forgiveness is giving strength back to the person we've hurt. When we sincerely ask for forgiveness, we recognize that the other person may need more than us. effort, understanding, or time to achieve a place of resolution, and we express a willingness to catch up on their terms. It allows them to set the timeline for when, or even if, goodwill can be restored to the relationship. It might sound like... I know there's no excuse for the way I betrayed your trust, but I'm doing everything I can to be worthy of her now. Can you ever forgive me? I miss my friend. I wish I'd been better off with them, and they'd give me a chance to make it up to you, but I understand that this day may never come. Although we often think of apology and forgiveness as opposite sides of the same emotional equation, offering one does not ensure the reception of the other. Asking for forgiveness does not guarantee that it will be given, and no matter how good we think our apology is, or how much effort we believe we put into learning and using each other's love languages and languages sorry, sometimes we are still able to say what we want to say. I keep the letter, but I'm learning to give up hope that I'll ever send it. Instead, I let it remind me of the ways I want to be a best friend in the future. It helps me remember to take responsibility for the ways I hurt people, and that intent doesn't outweigh the consequences. But most of all, it helps me remember that repairing the relationship can't be done on its own. Graphic by Coco Laschar Laschar

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