

“What Love Means...”

Have you ever heard the saying “love means... never having to say sorry”? I don’t know who thought this one up! In the real world of raising children, it doesn’t work.

It is inevitable in families that sometimes toes will be stepped on.

Trial and error is the real, daily stuff of parenting. It has challenged and taught me to recognise that relationships are bruised, often unintentionally, often carelessly, on a daily basis.

It is inevitable that family members impact each other and their relationships, simply because we live cheek by jowl in a nuclear family. None of us is a mind reader of someone else’s emotional state and this means that sometimes toes will be stepped on.

In my family, the trigger might be the inevitable tiredness at the end of the day, combined with the myriad of household jobs still needing to be done. Someone, any one of us, may get irritable. Or frustration erupts when The Teenager is preoccupied in his own little world, and forgets to respond to requests (often made more than once)!

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As parents we can feel that we are justified in being irritable or careless with our remarks toward our children. After all, who does the heavy lifting around here?! Who goes to work every day to support them, then comes home to continue doing things for them?

These feelings and thoughts are human, and everyone slips up sometimes. Our task as parents, though, is to show how saying sorry is part of every day life, and a life skill at that. Children only learn through seeing what their parents do.

We often expect children to say sorry when they have done the wrong thing. Sometimes they might learn over time that saying 'sorry' buys them a get-out-of-jail-free card, rather than being a tool for mending relationships.

It can feel incredibly difficult to approach your child to say "sorry that I was irritable earlier." You might think surely that will undermine your authority over them. What if they think that means they are in the right and you are in the wrong? Perhaps they will react triumphantly, or reject your apology, and you'll end up feeling weak.

A simple, heartfelt apology can bring back hope.

Or, will they see that Mum or Dad is willing to take that risk for the sake of mending the relationship? Will they observe that Mum or Dad isn't always in control of their feelings? And be surprised that even grown ups can be ashamed, or regretful about how they've expressed strong emotions? Perhaps discover that parents are not as all-powerful, as they imagined? Or not so much 'the enemy'?

A simple, heartfelt apology (which is **not** followed by the message of "but if you didn't drive me round the bend, I wouldn't lose my temper"!) can bring back hope and remind everyone that - even if the problem remains unsolved for now - the relationship is important.

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