

Tough to say the S-word

Sometimes the word “sorry” seems to be the hardest thing in the world for us to say.

We all know that awful feeling when we realise we have made a mistake, done the wrong thing or forgotten something vital. It hits us in the pit of the stomach and we feel a bit like a mouse trapped in a corner by a fierce tomcat – there seems no way out of our dilemma.

However, often just taking responsibility for our transgression is the only sensible option to follow, so why does it seem so difficult?

It’s tempting to sweep our relationship mistake under the carpet and hope it will go away without us having to face up to what we have done.

The trouble with this is that it’s bound to come out one day, usually in the middle of a rip-roaring argument when a past transgression has suddenly exploded into an incident.

But if you had used some heartfelt words and said “I’m sorry” at the time, you would have saved yourself a lot of future relationship stress.

Saying sorry is not easy, because we worry that the person to whom we are admitting our mistake will think a lot less of us.

Second, we may have a fear that our apology will be rejected, and interpret that as a rejection of ourselves as people.

Sometimes you just have to take the risk that an apology will not be accepted, because not to apologise is a bigger risk.

What are we hoping to achieve by saying sorry? Though we obviously want our partner to forgive us for our transgression, that should be our secondary goal.

What we should be aiming at first is to put the situation right by saying sorry, and this may mean more than lip service. There’s not much point saying sorry for having an affair if you are then going to go and repeat the behaviour all over again.

Saying sorry is about showing your partner that your remorse is genuine, and taking steps to avoid making the same mistake and hurting them in the future. This is especially applicable in situations of family violence, where perpetrators are often very remorseful and will shower their victims with apologies.

Unless those things are accompanied by definite steps to change the behaviour, such as taking an anger-management course or seeing a counsellor, the apology doesn’t mean much.

But in most situations, being brave enough to say you are sorry sincerely and show your partner that you didn’t mean to hurt them is a good way to a healthy relationship.

Survival tips

- **Don’t bury mistakes and hope they will go away – own up to them and apologise**
- **Apologising should be to heal the hurt you have caused your partner**
- **Just saying “I’m sorry” isn’t enough – you need to show that you won’t repeat that mistake.**

