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DOS AND DON'TS OF SAYING SORRY

The Straits Times · 3 Apr 2023 · C2

Like adults, children can detect a false apology, so it has to be heartfelt. Do so when you are ready to and mean what you say, says Dr Rebecca Chan, a lecturer from the National Institute of Education's Psychology and Child & Human Development academic group. Yet, do not sit on it for too long. "The longer the delay, the harder it gets for parents to apologise," says Ms Josephine Loh, senior manager for training in the family wellness division of Morning Star Community Services.

And be careful not to overdo it as this cheapens the meaning of the word, Dr Chan says. It can be tempting to apologise out of impulse to make the kids feel better, such as "I'm sorry you were not chosen as the class leader because I didn't help you prepare for the selection".

But kids should take responsibility for their leadership performance, not their parents. This may teach them to put the blame on others instead of reflecting how they could have done better.

Dr Chan and Ms Loh share 10 more reminders for parents.

Do

- Say sorry by taking full responsibility, without blaming other people, things or situations.
- Exercise empathy by hearing your child out. Learn to see from his or her perspective. • Explain your viewpoints rationally and clearly. It helps your child to see the conflict's causes.
- Check for mutual understanding. Have a rational heart-to-heart chat: What could you and your child have done differently to avoid such situations in the future?
- Hug and thank your child for having the conversation with you.

Don't

- Apologise when you have clearly done no wrong. Instead, explain the rationale of your decision. For instance, you disapprove of your child's outing because you want to protect him or her from harm.
- Say sorry on behalf of someone else. That is not your responsibility.
- Be vague about what you are apologising for.
- Be sarcastic to your child.
- Say "sorry, but..." It negates the effect of making amends.