

Why It's Hard to Apologize



Last week, Emily took her driver's test but failed. At dinner, she told her family but asked them all to promise not to tell anyone because she felt embarrassed. Yesterday, a friend, Jay, said to her, "Your sister, Kara, told me that you failed your driver's test. Are you going to take it again?" That afternoon at home, Emily was upset and told Kara, "Kara, I asked you not to tell anyone one about my test, but Jay said that you told him." At that moment, Kara knew she should say sorry, but she didn't want to. There is a common saying, "Three of the most difficult words for people to say are, 'I am sorry.'"

A researcher explained what a person like Kara is thinking when they need to apologize. Most of us believe that we are good, moral people. Because of this, some people cannot imagine that they could do something that would hurt another person. At first, they want to say they didn't do it, or they try to find an excuse. For example, Kara might say, "I think Jay already knew. Maybe someone else told him first." There are a few reasons why she would not just say sorry.

There are a couple of reason why she would not just apologize. First, Kara feels like she is a good person. If she apologizes, she is admitting that she isn't perfect, and that is painful. She worries that Emily might not respect her in the future. Also, if she admits that she made a mistake, it could hurt her relationship with Emily. In the future, Emily might not tell her any secrets, or maybe Emily will tell other people Kara's secrets.

Another reason why people hesitate to apologize is about control. If Kara says sorry to Emily, then Emily can control how Kara will feel about herself. If Emily doesn't accept Kara's apology, then Kara will feel bad about herself.

Research studies have found that when someone refuses to apologize, they actually feel better about themselves for a little while. They can keep a positive feeling about their character. They deny that they made a mistake, or say what happened wasn't serious, or they claim it was someone else's fault. They do those things because they don't want to feel bad. However, researchers have found that when we do apologize, it will actually help us feel better about ourselves. And people who can apologize are strong people, not weak people.

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Comprehension Exercise

Directions: Write T (true) or F (false) next to each sentence.

- ___ 1. Emily did not pass her driver's test.
- ___ 2. Kara told Jay not to tell anyone that Emily had failed her test.
- ___ 3. It is very difficult for people to say, "I am sorry."
- ___ 4. Kara thinks she is a good person. But if she apologizes, it means she made a mistake. That means that she is not a perfect person.
- ___ 5. If Kara admits that she told Jay the secret, then Jay might not tell her any secrets in the future.
- ___ 6. If we make a mistake but don't apologize, we will feel good about ourselves for a short time.

Paraphrasing Exercise

Directions: Imagine that you have this conversation with a friend.

You: I just read this interesting article.

Friend: Oh yeah. What did it say?

Write what you would tell your friend. Include as many details as you can.

After you finish writing a first draft, you can re-read the article and revise your draft.

However, don't look at the article while you are writing. You can use some of these **key words** in your paraphrase.

Key Words

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Emily• driver's test• Jay• "I am sorry."• deny• make excuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• good person• isn't perfect• tell secrets• feel better about ourselves for awhile• help us feel better about ourselves• strong people, not weak people
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Reflection Exercise

Directions: Write a reflection about the article. Try to write a paragraph with several sentences. In your reflection, your first sentence can be one of these:

- *I found some interesting/important information in this article.*
- *After reading this, I now would like to (learn more about /read more research about /...)*
- *There is some information in this article that I could apply to my life.*
- *I agree / disagree with the author about something.*
- *This article reminded me of (me/ my family/my friend).*
- *I was surprised by something in this article.*