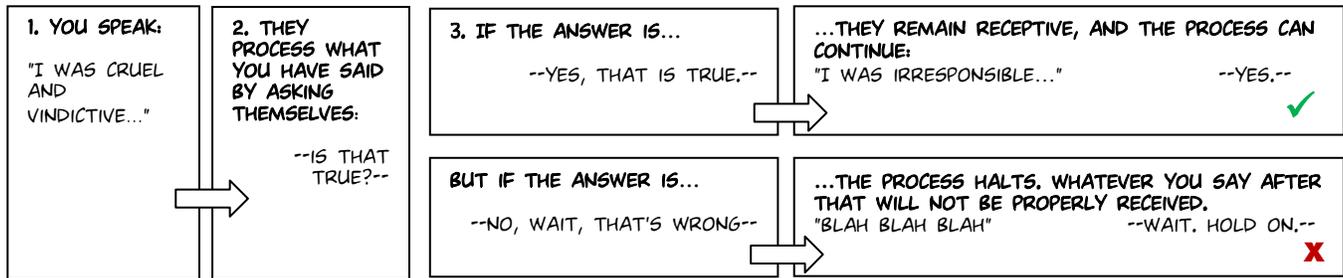


Step Eight, Part 2: HOW to prepare amends

Made a list of people we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.

How making amends works

Hearing your apology it is not a passive process for the recipient. Here's what happens as you make amends:



WHAT should I say?

The amends process can create some of the most intense interactions you or your recipients have ever had. Because of this, you cannot drag out the apology – it's selfish to hijack someone's attention for hours while you spill your guts. Therefore, your goal is to make amends simply and briefly without sacrificing completeness. This is actually not as hard as it sounds. Most amends take less than three minutes to make.

The formula for what to say when making amends is very simple:

The Basic Formula for Making Amends

Acknowledge the truth:	"This is what I did."
Accept responsibility:	"I know it was wrong."
Apologize:	"I am sorry."

Acknowledging the Truth, Simply

The meat of your amends will be an honest, vulnerable admission of what you have done. In order to do this, you will need to look at each name on your list and ask yourself some probing questions.

I. What, specifically, did I do?

Usually, there are specific incidents that must be acknowledged, either because they are vividly memorable or because you know the recipient was particularly upset by them. For example:

- I overstayed my welcome at your beach house.
- I ruined your 30th birthday party.
- I borrowed \$500 and never paid it back.
- I talked about you behind your back to Sally.
- I threw up in your car and didn't clean it up.

You don't have to list every single thing you did wrong, especially if your relationship with the person is long. As long as you hit the important or representative incidents and are sincere with the rest of the amends, they will not feel cheated.

2. More generally, what did I do wrong?

Try to list behavioral patterns or chronic problems that plagued your relationship with the recipient:

- I was physically abusive.
- I took our friendship for granted.
- I wasn't there for you when I should have been.
- I tried to hurt you by ignoring you.
- I only thought about myself and my needs.
- I withheld attention, affection, and sex.

3. How did I behave?

I find it is best to make a short list of adjectives that characterize your behavior. They should be strong, specific, and clearly applicable to the particular recipient. You might review your list of defects to see which, if any, apply.

- I was, spiteful, passive-aggressive, and mean.
- I was lazy, disrespectful, and oppositional.
- I was condescending, childish, and argumentative.

This is a powerful part of the process, because by telling them how you were wrong in an unvarnished and vulnerable way, you show that you understand exactly *how* your behavior was wrong.

Accepting Responsibility and Apologizing

This part is short but sometimes the hardest to say. Very simply, you will cap off your amends with the following:

"I know that my actions were wrong. I'm sorry."

Saying "I'm sorry" is not a meaningless convention that can be tossed out with the bathwater. The history of human interaction has coded immense power into those two little words.

When we have done wrong, we carry **guilt**, and the people we have harmed carry **resentment**. After we make our formal acknowledgement of our wrongs, the words "I'm sorry" trigger the final relinquishment of these burdens.

Five Characteristics of Successful Amends

The 9th step process will provide its maximum benefit if you strive to embody certain characteristics:

<p>Honesty Above all, you must tell the truth.</p>	<p>Sincerity You must mean what you say. Your apology can't sound like a chore you have been forced to perform.</p>	<p>Vulnerability If you are not defensive, your recipient may be able to listen with more compassion.</p>	<p>Humility You must not exaggerate.</p>	<p>Seriousness Once you begin, you should not clown around or make light of the process.</p>
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Avoiding Common Pitfalls While Making Amends

DON'T be overly general or unspecific.

You must provide enough information to show that you have seriously looked at your behavior.

<p>"SARAH, WHILE WE WERE MARRIED, I WAS DISHONEST. THAT WAS WRONG. I AM SORRY" --WHAT, REALLY? IS THAT ALL? WHAT A COP-OUT. I KNEW AA WAS BULLSHIT!--</p> <p style="text-align: right;">X</p>	<p>"I BEHAVED BADLY. I'M SORRY." --DUH. BUT DOES HE KNOW HOW?--</p> <p style="text-align: right;">X</p>
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DON'T be grandiose, dramatic or self-flagellating.

Any overstatement of your wrongs will come off as dishonest or as a plea for pity. Be honest about your behavior without exaggerating.

<p>"I WAS THE WORST HUSBAND EVER..." --THAT'S OBVIOUSLY NOT TRUE. IS THAT SUPPOSED TO MAKE ME FEEL BETTER?--</p> <p style="text-align: right;">X</p>	<p>"I SHOULD BURN IN HELL FOR WHAT I DID." --SHEESH, WHAT A MARTYR.--</p> <p style="text-align: right;">X</p>	<p>"I WAS MEAN, EVIL, STUPID, AWFUL, DEMONIC, CRUEL, SELFISH, GREEDY, GLUTTONOUS, PRIDEFUL, LAZY, OBNOXIOUS, GLIB TYRANNICAL, IRONIC, WORTHLESS, UNFAITHFUL, GLUM..." --YAWN.--</p> <p style="text-align: right;">X</p>
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NEVER make excuses, provide explanations, shift blame from yourself, or criticize others.

You must take responsibility for your wrongs. Any attempt to excuse, explain, understate, or justify your actions will shut down your listener in a heartbeat. Always stick to an honest confession of what you did and how you behaved.

<p>"I WAS A JERK WHEN I WAS DRUNK..." --BUT HE WAS ALWAYS DRUNK. DOES HE THINK THAT'S AN EXCUSE?--</p> <p style="text-align: right;">X</p>	<p>"I WAS A VICTIM OF MY ADDICTIVE TENDENCIES..." --WAIT A MINUTE. WHO'S THE VICTIM HERE?--</p> <p style="text-align: right;">X</p>	<p>"I THINK WE BOTH DID OUR SHARE OF HARM." --OH, DID WE? NICE APOLOGY, ASSHOLE. FUCK YOU!--</p> <p style="text-align: right;">X</p>	<p>"AFTER YOU STOLE MY CAR..." X</p> <p>"BECAUSE OF THE WAY I WAS RAISED..." X</p> <p>"I WAS IN A REALLY ANGRY PLACE..." X</p>
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DON'T analyze the recipient or tell them how they felt.

It's unwise to presume you know what someone else went through as a result of your wrongs. If you start expressing your recipient's emotions, they will have to stop and consider whether they agree with your assessment.

<p>"I MADE YOU JEALOUS..." --THAT'S NOT EXACTLY RIGHT. I WAS ANGRY, FOR SURE. JEALOUS? I DUNNO.--</p> <p style="text-align: right;">X</p>	<p>"I TRIED TO MAKE YOU JEALOUS..." --YES.--</p> <p style="text-align: right;">✓</p>	<p>"I TRIGGERED YOUR ABANDONMENT ISSUES..." --WHAT ARE YOU, MY SHRINK?--</p> <p style="text-align: right;">X</p>	<p>"I ABANDONED YOU..." --YES.--</p> <p style="text-align: right;">✓</p>	<p>"I MADE YOU CRAZY WITH MY ANTICS..." --DID HE JUST CALL ME CRAZY?--</p> <p style="text-align: right;">X</p>	<p>"I DIDN'T CONSIDER YOUR FEELINGS." --YES--</p> <p style="text-align: right;">✓</p>
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