

Requiring Apologies

Relevant Satellite Accreditation Standards

IV. Supporting Children's Development

B. The provider supports the development of positive self-esteem by helping children understand and appropriately express their feelings and needs.

2. The provider avoids using statements that discount or belittle children's feelings (for example, "you're not hurt"), or requiring apologies.



The Basics

What does sorry mean? *Sorry* is used as an expression of apology for some form of wrongdoing. When adults want children to apologize, they really want children to feel remorseful and sympathetic. Children are still developing the skills necessary to understand and connect their actions to consequences. A child apologizing after being prompted by an adult does not always mean they understand "the why" behind it. Research shows that although feelings of shame and embarrassment develop as young as 15 months old, children are still developing an understanding of how their actions affect others, physically and emotionally, well into middle childhood.

Why shouldn't you require apologies? Young children must be taught the foundational skills necessary to understand why an action may warrant an apology. This begins with emotional literacy, understanding the feelings of oneself and others. Instead of requiring children to apologize, focus on how their actions affect others. For example: "You were moving too fast and knocked over your friend. Look at their face. They are sad. How can we help them?" When children are resistant to resolve conflicts, they may be experiencing shame, frustration, and anger. Without acknowledging and working through emotions on both sides of a conflict, a resolution can never be fully achieved. There are many ways to show feeling apologetic that go beyond saying sorry.

[How do I teach about consequences?](#) *Pause* (if you can). Take a moment to assess the conflict. See both children the way you wish you would have been seen in these moments as a child. Often young children do not possess the skills to communicate their wants and needs in a way that adults find socially appropriate. This is especially true for infants, toddlers, and all children experiencing big feelings. *Model*. Communicate for them. Teach the skill you are hoping to see. You will have to practice this skill with them consistently overtime. For example, “You were feeling so excited that you forgot to ask Jayden for a turn. Look at his face; he did not like that. What can we do?” *Reinforce*. Once children can prevent or resolve conflicts independently, notice and reinforce the skill. For example, “I saw Oliver share his toy with Monique! Look at how happy she is. That was so kind.” With positive guidance from a supportive adult, children will begin to understand how their actions affect those around them.

[I want to learn more!](#)

- [Help Young Children with Conflict Resolution](#) (Resource)
- [Enhancing Emotional Vocabulary in Young Children](#) (Article)
- [Teaching Your Child About Feelings from Birth to Age 2](#) (Resource)