

JACK'S CORNER

QUESTION: When my 7-year-old does something wrong, he just casually says "sorry" and thinks everything is OK. I'm worried that his "sorry" is becoming meaningless. What can I do?

ANSWER: Often kids (and adults) look for an easy "formula" to make difficult situations in life less work. "Sorry" can become a formula to get a child out of a uncomfortable situation and to avoid punishment. As Christian parents, we know the importance of a truly repentant heart. **Forgiveness is costly**; we want our children not only to **understand** this concept, but to **feel** it in their hearts as well. Repentance involves three parts:

1. **Knowing and feeling that we have done something wrong.** This involves guilt. One of the functions of the Holy Spirit is to convict us of sin. Guilt for the Christian motivates us to seek forgiveness from our Lord. It also helps us have a deep appreciation for the Cross.
2. **Making a conscious and prayerful decision to try to avoid committing the same sin again.** The Holy Spirit helps us resist temptation. Our love for our Savior, inspired by the Spirit, helps motivate us to want to try to live like Christ.
3. **Making amends.** Putting things right is often the step that is left out. This is the practical, accountable part of repentance.... the "community service." Making restitution for a wrongful act will help a person remember and personalize his/her sin.

It is in restitution that numbers 1 and 2 have the best chance of happening. Don't settle for a casual "sorry". (1) Insist that your child look the person he has wronged in the eye. (2) Confess his wrong to the person. (3) Tell the person how he will try to set things right again. (4) Afterward, let your child know that he has done a God-pleasing action, and that you are proud of him!

Often, in letting our children off too easily and not insisting on restitution, we rob repentance of its **power to transform**. For those parents worried about their child's self-esteem in all of this....children who are given opportunities to make amends for their wrongs emerge humbler, but feeling good about their courage, character, and accomplishment!

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P.S. Sadly, I rarely see this three-step repentance in adults. We often demand far more from our children than we have the courage to do ourselves. Adults usually flee, get even, blame, or take the shallow "sorry" way out. Wouldn't it awesome and inspiring for our children if we held ourselves to the same standard we want for them! Think what they would learn!