



#sorrynotsorry

A nice controversial question to consider: should we make our children say sorry?

Does a forced sorry mean anything?

When a child is threatened with a consequence to make them apologise, do they really mean it, or are they just trying to avoid trouble? “I’ve said sorry” can become a formula for stopping further sanctions, rather than genuine remorse. Sometimes what is really being said is “sorry I got caught.”

Children learn by watching us

Children learn most from observing us, on good days when we are patient and kind, and on bad days when we lose our temper. How are we doing at saying sorry ourselves? Is it easy, or do we avoid it for fear of “losing face”?

Model a genuine apology

Homes should be places where mistakes happen, and where we can apologise and try again. If we have overreacted, it is powerful to say so: “It wasn’t okay that you refused to tidy up, but I’m sorry I shouted.” Children may accept it or may still be upset, and either is fine, we have modelled a respectful apology; it is not a child’s job to make us feel better.

Accept a genuine apology

When children do apologise, we need to accept it graciously, even if we do not feel like it, while still being honest about how their behaviour made us feel. There can still be a consequence and an apology at the same time.

Beyond the word “sorry”

Some children struggle to say the word itself. Encouraging them to problem-solve, “your brother is feeling sad because you hit him, how could you help him feel better?”, or to make amends through a hug or a drawing, can be just as meaningful. What matters is recognising genuine remorse and praising the effort to repair the relationship.