

Don't Demand An Apology!

Here's why some very decent people can't apologize

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Tendering a genuine apology when an apology is due can go a long way to repair a disconnection following a fight. But if you're coupled up with someone who doesn't apologize, it won't help to doggedly demand it. Instead follow Rule # 49 in *Marriage Rules: A Manual for the Married and the Coupled Up*. "Don't demand an apology."

Try to understand that some people can't or won't offer a genuine heartfelt apology even if you deserve one.

There are many reasons why certain very decent people can't apologize. For example, your partner may be a perfectionist, so hard on himself that he doesn't have the emotional room to apologize. Or he may have too much shame to say, "I'm sorry." People need to have fairly decent self-esteem to view their own less-than-honorable behaviors clearly, and apologize for them.

If you're married, your partner's experience growing up in his first family may have made the act of apologizing too emotionally loaded. One man who wouldn't apologize to his wife or children told me this: "My parents were always in my face to get me to apologize to my brother and always assumed everything was my fault. "His folks would say, "You apologize to Scott right now!" Then, "That wasn't a real apology. Now say it like you mean it!"

He found the process so humiliating that his solution as an adult was to never say he was sorry. If his wife insisted he owed her an apology, he'd withdraw into silence or grumble "I'm sorry" as a way to get her off his back.

Almost everybody has a hard time apologizing if they feel "over accused", that is, pushed to assume more than their fair share of the blame. As one man put it, "When my wife criticizes me, I don't want to apologize because I feel like I'm putting my neck on the chopping block. If I apologize, I'm agreeing with her that I'm the whole problem. And that's not true." If your partner experiences offering an apology as a blanket statement of his culpability or inadequacy he won't be able to do it.

Do request an apology, if you think it's due. Talk with your non-apologizing partner over time to help him understand how important an apology is to you. Try to learn more from him about why apologies are not forthcoming.

But don't get into a tug of war about it. An entrenched non-apologizer may use a non-verbal way of trying to defuse tension, reconnect after a fight, or try to show you that he or she is in a new place and wants to move toward you.