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But suppose we can equip ourselves with tools for navigating challenging situations. In that case, we can more effectively practice harm reduction if and when it occurs – and feel more confident when engaging in uncomfortable situations. This act may allow us to stay in relationship – not run and flee.    One of these tools is the act of apologizing. And apologizing isn’t embedded in U.S. culture. Generally, people in the U.S. are wary of admitting that they are wrong. A personal admission of guilt can lead to consequences – a loss of respect, friends, and community, and complicated emotions to process individually. A study found that, on average, politicians who apologized were more likely to lose support than gain it afterward, which some use as a rationale for why President Trump doesn’t apologize ([NYTimes](https://d2p-qh04.na1.hubspotlinks.com/Ctc/RJ+113/d2p-qh04/VXhfhC1ZLt6hW5YRq6X1xYWd2W5n2k0f583LkYN3Lg8983m2ndW8wLKSR6lZ3mqW7YVGjW6k8YW-W4nDrFW3cY9_PW6psQNR86g3r7W300K557kQD0cW1pJdGT1NZY9JW8NbQ5W8yx0VMW5RwRpJ7JrbbwW6WhhfN14TH5GW8YnwcV17xkYDW1_6Fk294H4XLW8jHRmk5TPh4wW8GjWRt8g3rryN3cDJwfrZB_SW74X61G2hFvTbVPQjhW2Yw-1MW3rNcmh8GCR0qVwCfpB7C6zqMVsDxRd4NhTVGW6RZ1hr3zv_KcW1dl5G790H7WDW212C6v7Y_mR3W2yNVjn3lgzy3W5RybCN3J8ZBWW8XWm161Jf-dCW82yx6C3--YdnW29Crtr4zxh7cW10K1VC41Hp6kW5BMKBF7TGxyKf3HFh7v04)). Legally, apologies can be weaponized for punishment, which is why lawyers and insurance agents may recommend against it  ([The Daily Beast](https://d2p-qh04.na1.hubspotlinks.com/Ctc/RJ+113/d2p-qh04/VXhfhC1ZLt6hW5YRq6X1xYWd2W5n2k0f583LkYN3Lg8983m2ndW8wLKSR6lZ3nhW4S-qSx3f0vkNW2Lml-11v6G1gW65JLWp38CM3fN39-6jNP6yMNW6dWVBy7GjKt3W57f-tw47ZHpCW8t6ZcQ32vwK3W3VYyTC7HfrY7W2WQlJC3L3PN0W3_QtYT5J9xm3W5FYHdr4jMqBCW6pNpfY6Sk9r-VjdXkp7PBYVMVGx4GK4FvFhtN83RNHhl6fgtW1BNZHp4tXYsSW31cfPn1L_SrxVNzTy-2C4ytkW2-XyZX7QVMwCW8Y93CR2Y_KcfW8Yy97_11RXDmW2BqjBV6sLWsXW6081k25rvllDW37WGzc3p6g4sW2F_wT18NsQF-W1LXcst1gYRMZVc4K-X6xDBf_W7C4WqS6_Drc6f12bM4s04)).    This perspective is quite different than how other countries embrace apologies as part of their culture, as explained in [Harvard Business Review](https://d2p-qh04.na1.hubspotlinks.com/Ctc/RJ+113/d2p-qh04/VXhfhC1ZLt6hW5YRq6X1xYWd2W5n2k0f583LkYN3Lg88T3m2ndW7Y8-PT6lZ3nKW8bHF0S3jXXWJW1B-gxL7hTydVW18wW3_18fv2cW4hd-pZ2-NHkdW9d-nzd6k-CB6W5crwKs7JWvRGW7jp-cC8s3N8VVkqlxQ54wX7XW311QxD1MYvRhW4kSLVm21GRLfW6tG32w6xh1_6W212rST1mr_00N1PZM201dqvxW7ZMHVs20vdrbW6zQxDW3FYkdhW6NVJf-40GLhnW76tm413T56RZVMmT9s17lYZ3W5ts_zy9dFdPrW334Hkv8l1RCmN6lVg8tQzc9PN3z0wVh5MtWRW1Gfq-12Pf4sFW3n1Cky8K65b6V3KlXy5-wcTrN7DWwFdCYRktf7Kvrvs04). And here, it seems our aversion to apologizing is part of our relationship with power. An offender will often choose not to apologize because they “maintain a greater sense of control and often feel better about themselves” ([Scientific American](https://d2p-qh04.na1.hubspotlinks.com/Ctc/RJ+113/d2p-qh04/VXhfhC1ZLt6hW5YRq6X1xYWd2W5n2k0f583LkYN3Lg8983m2ndW8wLKSR6lZ3pRW3ptMMp26Q09nW8xrtG61q-SLrN5w_qdMdymWcW7g_NHQ5m7WZNW2hW-2v7P9M0XW6xg2qL5t0MGgW1T-1M_8cb27vN8TyCpgRYR88W44_xCg2sVDf9N1D4clGnzjlqW3P8X_m9bhzHCW8HwdjD487WlXW2DQKFY7rFFFnW74575Q7lk5xfVJg-762F6sMQV2b3V06hW7cVW9gLw2g753qB_W5mlvsd3Rtg4BW3zzFRd1NMrp3W7C6hnv5_gyHZW8XznPf38_VTbW3j0TFM31HvQtW5l-N6M3jgQ_9W6Xq1sx7M43xmW1v5p4Z7zQF-lVkpNTk4DtsHtW77rRct7wR5xyW4ymn4Q6GQT84f6W18z-04)). This perceived sense of power may feel like protection against external shame, blame, and consequences.    But it also blocks us from accountability – a critical skill needed when we’re doing this work. Not just when we engage in conversations on a one-on-one basis, but when we envision how we want communities to thrive. We can’t continue to rely on punitive practices when we work to change systems: like re-imagining public safety and collective care. And we can’t keep shaming our leaders for admitting mistakes until we are ultimately left with those too proud to do so.    Luckily, we can practice apologies on our own and bring them into our next conversation. And a wholesome apology is more than just saying, “I’m sorry.” There are many spaces for inspiration you can go to for apologies, including your own spiritual, religious, or cultural backgrounds. I have learned a lot from resources created by [Mia Mingus](https://d2p-qh04.na1.hubspotlinks.com/Ctc/RJ+113/d2p-qh04/VXhfhC1ZLt6hW5YRq6X1xYWd2W5n2k0f583LkYN3Lg88z3m2ndW7lCdLW6lZ3mVW5hZB1d2FZLzhW3_lfZJ8QkbhsW8V4H8h8wWrh8N8G34DhHf7DGW30pJyd6hMCT4N1H1rSyCfN7hN8G2VlFrZLmMW4SZgf03461VdW4gTzvx1hXd6zW51zVZm5_0PNFVMX_gK6mGX6mW3YjWMS5xfVXbW7l3W8Q6rvlgQW6bc3sw1ChR_FW24Mrmh7T7XNQW6_l7Zf8-Pg06W5M3Nqs19d8BwW40lr575dt-4NW64_q3c2DsftSW222kLR8rLxRtW77yrKF6wkRyYW10B65V8DGzJ2W7PNwJW4N7Tf5W8Khj7v2kdGm-f5nLkSq04) and [Brené Brown](https://d2p-qh04.na1.hubspotlinks.com/Ctc/RJ+113/d2p-qh04/VXhfhC1ZLt6hW5YRq6X1xYWd2W5n2k0f583LkYN3Lg89s3m2ndW95jsWP6lZ3q6W98Kmhv3RrfFtW1V9KNK1ClV-QVzBYfd54nrrbW3lXlxN6sdq7_W8mkwfM62zcQ7W7ZgN0c1Y5nZxN4Ll-HGxGphsN27HfqFpv9j6W29YvXq6zShb_W7n-1bv6vnzPrW3VpQVC9dVw05W71xFNZ7B9r-PN170VN0ncy_gW1Ct1Pp1-d--wW2d8Xr_3d_2d3W7Mx9pn1NChWyW5jpLpw439KnnW4WyjXd1_N-49W5QYvtw6g_8LKW6zS9dp9hZs70W1y-fM66TDTBzW6GZMDL8mSqrYW8Yqbq44FHCMDMfMKsp8gp7fW3c3QWF5LpFjsW7_pXSB62nFVZW8FhXcz7_RQj5W63lxfL5F7gJkW3yy_1q8jtQssW6Zfvq24xzwJKf6NJ5C404) and recommend their work in full. Here are some important points I’ve learned:    **Invest in self-reflection.**  The apologies we’re focusing on aren’t the compulsive “OMG, I’m SO sorry” ones you might squawk out if you bump into someone on the street. We’re looking for thoughtful and sincere apologies, and those often take some deep self-refection. To complete the following steps, you must be willing to understand your role in what happened. That may include journaling and processing individually, talking with a friend, or learning from books, podcasts, etc. Start here so you can do your best moving forward. [Learn more via Mia Mingus](https://d2p-qh04.na1.hubspotlinks.com/Ctc/RJ+113/d2p-qh04/VXhfhC1ZLt6hW5YRq6X1xYWd2W5n2k0f583LkYN3Lg87n5kBVqW50kH_H6lZ3nhN2tH-p3fx65RVQTw6V7NxqJLW2r5zq41FXJr2W4LZLMX8jBbMsV551c63z3YqWN3-GB2SyQwXSW7kv1kq6JHxr8W4ThHCJ1LBvvhW7t_wGp6nvBTcW59V_Gl82YfrcW7D4p_95Y54VZW3sgk4G3Ft4XDW4ryRMg5fhw27W7fDRn91Q0DVLW8NMgz91ht4YTW8GYLw38VW0CTW8d180-66ywLJM7THpMbJlfDW14qgtv5wLCpdW3rtvGY1bH6tmW4RWbd_91yY7jW4lGVjf6GfKM1W1b76y27JBdTlW7MLDxz89zc3KN2lVTfslN7slW1NQwq82ThrpgW5ZDY-d1DM39jW8hMcqs9fM-0MW39Wr7z3qyMjyW34JcLX9lZBvWVsWvcn8KhnQZW7P9g3q62pdtmf9cM39z04).    **Note: Reflect on what is yours to own.**  I think it’s worth including from my perspective as a Black woman born and raised in the U.S. Women, women of color particularly, are often burdened to take responsibility for the wrongdoings around them. I often find myself wanting to apologize for something that was done to me, not by me. I encourage all of us, but particularly those most marginalized, to reflect on whether or not that’s actually our burden to carry, especially if we’re the ones receiving the harm.    **Say you’re sorry.**  Naming that your sorry – without any “ifs, ands, or buts” is critical. Changing, or removing this phrase entirely, is a common way people try to eschew responsibility. Using phrases like “I’m sorry you felt that way” or “I didn’t realize you’re so sensitive” puts the focus on the other person’s feelings, not your actions. Phrases like these can be wielded to manipulate or even gaslight others, too, so you want to avoid that regardless of intention. Instead, stick to the action that you can apologize for, like, “I’m sorry I said what I said last night.” [More on this from Brene Brown in conversation with Harriet Lerner](https://d2p-qh04.na1.hubspotlinks.com/Ctc/RJ+113/d2p-qh04/VXhfhC1ZLt6hW5YRq6X1xYWd2W5n2k0f583LkYN3Lg89s3m2ndW95jsWP6lZ3pCW1BC7fF7SSJ6QW7Pxf7m5ZS4g5W5sP9Gt1Wb-r0W37007W7CSfXJW5jk9Jf1X5nMxW23b-cD128FDtV6BLfs1_LPgFW53zhrp29N318N1xc03XwFJ6YN6ClB3yFr_HMW7-z5Nz8Mp5ylW2sdqD01FNzwHW3wZ7wf1MPvvFW5Yb0Zj8yxNx8W775kgV1DWb0RN6QQmYs8s2XbW6nx83M8-sMb-N1Bvh7ZWrpzHW37smJs5clB6ZW97fb-p6MJWp9W3mp7X97V4HVPW8vhxLc99S05zVxnl2N7dxGy7W77htbn1GQTf-Vz-Vhh1XyHJCW59YhGV2dfHmNW8y0PqJ5cgGtXW4_dJbp1mlxKWW1MSfMG3RvY55W3V_HJM8BXkR3f4F76_Y04).    **Acknowledge the impact.**  We reference intention v. impact often in this newsletter because it’s an essential act of accountability ([learn more here](https://d2p-qh04.na1.hubspotlinks.com/Ctc/RJ+113/d2p-qh04/VXhfhC1ZLt6hW5YRq6X1xYWd2W5n2k0f583LkYN3Lg87n5kBVqW50kH_H6lZ3pkW8_BkKq8ll_kZW22XzMm1B__c0W3kBTQs5NLZDhW8H0v166NHJSCW8yrVmk8jcH49N2B7PzjCB5GYW2k_9Pm27qD3kW8vZjdG3Mtb1nN52jd_q_GY9bVWS2Y31HwzJMV7SyGW97h1zLW9dHy7L3vvPtLN6lNvXj_9b8gW8H04sZ3ZqPdrW2tN_d56tvZqFW3TK7dd35nkNxW13K4tT1qfZ-hW77rSG99b_3dtW65k5qn4Cp-jCW2x48ZT7MNtmBVZscW-4QNGl0W7JMwGD6fmXXNW2fdTRb6Mmdd4W6thWL592rBRsW1rkkD33-mnCCW11WrR57rg2LNW6LPZkC6Hb6-0W21mBbH7vBH8YW2DfQ4s7xQf6xW6X08TT4rwPn_N7gkYBSQWRVMW1YPcmp6vKS8tf6C88Zz04)). And that’s no difference when it comes to apologizing. Instead of emphasizing that you “didn’t mean” or “never intended” to do something, name and acknowledge the impact. That can look like “I realize my behavior last night made you upset” or “I now understand that my actions are incredibly condescending. I appreciate how[Franchesca Ramsey breaks this down](https://d2p-qh04.na1.hubspotlinks.com/Ctc/RJ+113/d2p-qh04/VXhfhC1ZLt6hW5YRq6X1xYWd2W5n2k0f583LkYN3Lg88T3m2ndW7Y8-PT6lZ3n5VpBf_c7-MFWKW6GjzhC5l1M9PW9f8-df5MyD8SW8sQXk56Psf1kW1dgj5-144RC5W6nMNqb3HRncpW5dPg8D5mkpjqMFqC6kdJzBgVhK-Bd4rpmhZW4YwFg17SylWsMKzfpVBn186W7B80vd25PhBjV8Q_VL2gJdzzW1kqdsw3bXXB8W4tXTp-4JWYNhW1-Tjld15b_-tW1Ssybd4JZ2GYW1K3Ypv43FBhfW6fGW555gpxYmN41d3p_sJFQcW5MV40z5bh-TTN1lL2VyQPDjBW61h-6q40PnpvW7RZq9d2Xk3NdN720knjJw6NpW2DZsQt2x0P1lf2psVhP04) in this video.    **Change your behavior.**  An apology is something we do, not something we say. And we carry it forward by changing our behavior to minimize opportunities for future harm. This action might be something you name in your apology, like “moving forward, I will not talk to you that way again.” It may also be something you commit to learning more about so you can grow, “I’m going to take a course so I can better understand how to engage properly.” But neither you, the recipient, or society gain anything until you put it into practice. This might be difficult, and burdensome, and tiring, and overwhelming – yet if you’re going to apologize, you have to be committed to this step. [Learn more via Mia Mingus](https://d2p-qh04.na1.hubspotlinks.com/Ctc/RJ+113/d2p-qh04/VXhfhC1ZLt6hW5YRq6X1xYWd2W5n2k0f583LkYN3Lg87n5kBVqW50kH_H6lZ3pVN75rkRF-TFTVV6-NN81p-Yw7W85mxq67PWndZW3lkDPt2PKs-9W5yjVsW6x2TSdW2Qzzc82ZBk73W22MF6H8rkdKDW5X1TXn1DfQmCV7gYxN2NbdyRW2BnM651myVtpW7sc1gm3_7JjvW6dlWqD9hjpqRW74Vc8h88NzBwW3xtZd_7VdH6RM2wdF6LF_nGW2DC5jf5V_wydVhym9N6Rxm8sW4XVqwt5Jp-TDN342PTRS--t9W4VRY4D5N5RK0W10G22K9fVpgNW5fQGpS3RDzLbW91_Zzs8Ttwl-W96cmJS6wYg1yW1h7hTV8xhvQyW3JYBpk8QHr-zW7mKgcd4P_CfkW7M5QBP8smwVmW2pbDck5SwVrjW11Hf293bDMYKN30TzqwClDCJW9hsYNM4x_B6lf3tGr9K04).    Remember that after you apologize, regardless of how well-rehearsed and well-practiced, you have to detach yourself from the outcome. No one owes you their forgiveness, no matter how deeply you may desire it. Respect the recipient’s boundaries and ensure your apology is consensual. And, note that an apology is not a replacement with other forms of accountability, like giving reparations or removing yourself from a position of power. But sometimes, an apology can be an excellent start to transforming our relationships – with ourselves, each other, and society as a whole. And we have to start somewhere. | | |
| |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | KEY TAKEAWAYS |  |  | | --- | | * Apologizing is a form of accountability. * U.S. culture tends to prioritize punishment over accountability. To disrupt these systems, we must disrupt how we relate to apologies. * Apologies can be well-crafted and practiced, but that still doesn’t mean that they need to be accepted. | | |