

How to Handle Sin in a Relationship

Here are the principles with a brief sentence of explanation.

The Seven A's of Confession (see Matt. 7:3-5; 1 John 1:8-9; Prov. 28:13)

1. **Address** everyone involved.

We haven't fully confessed a sin or wrongdoing until we engage all those affected. If the situation happened between two people, then the two involved should be addressed. If I wronged someone before a group, then the group should be addressed.

2. **Avoid** "if," "but" and "maybe."

These are magic words that actually erase the apology. They shift blame or nullify the apology. "If you hadn't...." "I wouldn't have ____ but you...." "Maybe things would have been different if... but...." Rarely does this feel like a sincere apology to those who have been wounded or wronged.

3. **Admit** specifically.

General "I'm sorry" statements without identifying the wrong leave the impression we're not actually aware of what we've done or that we're unwilling to account for it. The more specific the apology the more thoughtful and genuine it is.

4. **Acknowledge** the hurt.

Sometimes we leave off this step. Sometimes facing the hurt can overwhelm the guilty. But until we show some empathy and compassion by saying, "My words must have made you feel small... embarrassed you... or angered you," then we haven't fully acknowledged the humanity of the one we've wronged. Acknowledging the hurt goes some distance in repairing the breach.

5. **Accept** the consequences.

Sometimes we want "I'm sorry" to erase all consequences. We can use apologies as a "get out of jail free" card. "I said I'm sorry; what more do you want?" indicates that our repentance is incomplete. But a genuine confession accepts that there may be consequences to follow our confession. We accept that we may need to pay for some damaged property, lose a friendship for our transgression, or endure a bad reputation. In either event, we play the adult and accept whatever outcomes result from our wrong.

6. **Alter** your behavior.

We're not truly repentant until we do this. And failing to do this undermines our apology and any trust we're trying to rebuild.

7. **Ask** for forgiveness.

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Actually make the ask. "Will you forgive me?" We should give the person we've wronged the dignity of processing their hurt and responding honestly. We may have to wait a long time before forgiveness comes. We ought not assume everything can be instantly waived away. So we ask and we wait a reply when we're genuine in our confession.

The Four Promises of Forgiveness (see Matt. 6:12; 1 Cor. 13:5; Eph. 4:32)

1. "I will not dwell on this incident."

We haven't forgiven if we can't let it go. If we're brooding on an injury or transgression after a confession then we're holding the guilt over a person's head. "I will forgive you but I will not forget" may in fact be unforgiveness. I love Corrie Ten Boom's comment in reply to a former colleague asking if she remembered the colleague's transgression from some years prior. Corrie said, "I distinctly remember forgetting."

2. I will not bring this incident up and use it against you.

When we haven't forgiven, we can store a transgression until that "right time" when we can attack with it, leverage some future outcome or gain some advantage. That's not forgiveness; that's manipulation. It's old fashioned "pay back." Then we're in need of confessing our wrongdoing.

3. I will not talk to others about this incident.

If we forgive a person then the matter should not be spread to others. Apart from serious situations requiring counseling or the like, we never raise the matter with others.

4. I will not allow this incident to stand between us or hinder our personal relationship.

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/thabiti-anyabwile/how-to-make-a-confession-and-extend-forgiveness/>