

Therapists by Day Book Review

Why Won't You Apologize?: Healing Big Betrayals and Everyday Hurts- by Harriet Lerner, PH.D.

Harriet Lerner offers the idea about the power of the words "I'm sorry" and how that begins the possibility of restoring trust, which I agree with. The book however is longer than needed, and doesn't really offer any unique or new information. I liked her book "The Dance of Anger " much better.

Having said that, I was recently told by a person raising money that my request for her to apologize to those she offended was "my agenda", not hers. I am guilty as I try to model resolution of conflicts. It takes courage to apologize and Dr. Lerner points out that not everyone has the ego strength to do so. Many live defended by keeping anger and blame as their defense. "Why Won't You Apologize?" is a great question! - Dr. Michele Winchester-Vega, DSW, LCSW-R

As a mother I often catch myself coaching my children to apologize to each other or to other people. Though this is at times necessary, I feel that there is not often an education that follows about what an apology is, when one is appropriate, and how to apologize. Dr. Lerner's book focuses on the concept of what an apology is and the impact it has on human connections.

I have worked with clients who both over-and-under apologize. Many clients feel a need to apologize for any-and-everything- "I'm sorry it's raining," "I'm sorry I'm a second late," or hold the family role of one who keeps the peace by assuming all the blame and getting the lion's share of the work. On the flip-side there are clients who never-or-rarely apologize. Their family may feel resistant to approach them for help and their not allowing themselves to feel vulnerable by acknowledging doing wrong allows them to not take responsibility for harm they may have caused others. Both of these roles put a barrier in the potential closeness of their relationships, cause anxiety, and neither extreme is healthy.

Patterns of how one apologizes are often learned in childhood but may not be beneficial as an adult navigating the world. Dr. Lerner's book explores these patterns. It also considers when to apologize, when not to apologize, whether to accept an apology, and how to manage when you feel that an apology is due to you but will never be received. This book and its lessons can help people learn to expect respect from others, set appropriate limits, and knowing when they should apologize and when not to.

Dr. Lerner's book can also be beneficial to someone who owes someone an apology but is stuck on how to craft it in a way where the true meaning of "I'm sorry" can be heard. Oftentimes when we apologize the apology contains in it a "but" which transforms it from a true apology to an expectation that the other person take responsibility too. There is a place for this acknowledgment, but it doesn't belong in a sincere attempt to apologize. In Dr. Lerner's book other false types of apologies are considered along with how to construct a well thought out and sincere apology. This book would be useful in helping people learn how to set better limitations and expectations in their lives.

Overall, I appreciated the thought, insight, and depth to which Dr. Lerner explored the act of apologizing. I feel it is a topic that is often overlooked but integral to human connectedness. However, I had trouble losing myself in the book. I found it repetitive and read as a very long brochure. Even through these challenges I found her message on-point and well thought out. - Christine Schaeztl, LCSW

Harriet Learner does a great job of concisely portraying the pitfalls and dangers involved with the problem of ineffective and inauthentic apologies. I found this work to have a straightforward and easy to understand approach needed for overcoming obstacles to real resolution of pain or anger. This book presents the reader with tools for taking a humble and accountable approach to getting to a place of understanding and mutual respect. Harriet Learner provides a plausible and simple approach to helping people to do self examination required for understanding where their ability lies in breaking down barriers to genuine, open and heartfelt dialogue. I specifically like the section of the book that focuses on the language used when a person is not ready to take full responsibility and issues a pseudo apology through the use of

"ifs" and "buts". Here the intention is to make the other person feel a sense of responsibility or guilt. It is well noted that an apology should not become work for the person it is directed towards. Overall I would recommend this book as a tool for people who struggle with finding opportunities for use of integrity and humility in getting to a point of healing and letting go of resentment in their relationships. - David J. Miranda, LMSW

In her latest book, bestselling author and practicing psychotherapist Harriet Lerner, Ph.D., tackles a topic that will be relevant to most readers: *Why Won't You Apologize?* With her tremendous understanding of human nature and her decades of experience in counseling, Lerner shares essential insights into those most difficult interactions: When we feel we have been wronged and are seeking an apology; or, when we are being asked to, or need to apologize for a harm done to another. Oftentimes, an apology is not forthcoming, or it is incomplete, or inadequate, compounding the frustration and pain. One of Lerner's most valuable contributions is to shine a light on the reasons why a person may choose not to, or actually lack the ability to offer a satisfying apology, due to his or her own emotional limitations. With her characteristic wisdom and accessible style, the author helps the reader grow in compassion and in the capacity to face the very human challenges of healing the hurts, both caused and received in the course of one's life. - Jane Carey, LCSW-R