

Actions don't always speak louder than words -- At least, not when it comes to forgiveness

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People are more likely to show forgiving behavior if they receive restitution, but they are more prone to report they have forgiven if they get an apology, according to Baylor University research published in the *Journal of Positive Psychology*.

The study underscores the importance of both restitution and apology and of using multiple measures for [forgiveness](#), including behavior, said Jo-Ann Tsang, Ph.D., an associate professor of psychology and [neuroscience](#) in Baylor's College of Arts & Sciences.

"One of the main reasons for using behavioral measures in addition to self-reporting by individuals is that they can make themselves look better by only self-reporting, although they don't necessarily intend to lie," she said. "And it may be that 'I forgive you' is a more conscious feeling if they receive an apology."

In the study, 136 undergraduate psychology students were stationed in individual cubicles and told that raffle tickets for a \$50 gift card would be given out in three rounds, with 10 tickets per round to be divided between a participant and a unknown "partner." They also were told they might receive a note from the partner.

In the first round, participants were given only two of the 10 tickets split between them and their partners; in the second, they got nine. Some were told the distributions were made by the partner; others were told it was by chance.

Some participants received an apology note from their partners on the second round, saying, "Sorry about that first round. I got carried away, and I feel really bad that I did that." Some participants also received raffle tickets back from their partners in the second round, a form of restitution. In the last round, the participants were given the chance to be in charge of distributions themselves.

Researchers examined the links between apology, restitution, empathy and forgiveness, measuring forgiveness in two ways: Through behavior (how many raffle tickets participants gave to their partners on the third round); and self-reporting on a questionnaire, with [participants](#) telling how highly they rated their motivation to forgive.

Researchers wrote that "making amends can facilitate forgiveness, but not all amends can fully compensate for offenses." Apology may be needed to repair damage fully, but it may be a "silent forgiveness," while restitution without [apology](#) may lead to a "hollow forgiveness" in which the offenders are treated better but not necessarily forgiven.

"The results suggest that if transgressors seek both psychological and interpersonal forgiveness from their victims, they must pair their apologies with restitution," they wrote. "Apparently, actions and words speak loudest in concert."

More information: The article on the study — "Do Actions Speak Louder than Words? Differential Effects of Apology and Restitution and Self-Report Measures of Forgiveness" — may be viewed at this link: www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17439760.2012.690444

Provided by Baylor University

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