



Repairing Harm Summary

Why Guidance for Repairing Harm?

Children ages 5-10 are working on understanding rules and applying them in various situations. They are seeking independence and will naturally test limits and break rules. When they do, they require guidance on how to repair harm caused to a relationship or item. This is a normal part of their development and necessary for their learning. Research confirms that children are in the process of developing higher order thinking skills like consequential thinking and linking cause to effect. This directly impacts their school success and ability to take responsibility for their actions as they grow. Children need the guidance and support of caring adults to learn these skills.

Step 1. Get Your Child Thinking by Getting Their **Input**

- You can ask them about how they are feeling.
 - *"I noticed your face got really red. So, when you said unkind things to your sister, were you feeling frustrated?"*
 - *"I saw your friend leave you at the playground to go play with someone else. I wonder if you are feeling sad?"*
- You can also ask them about how they think others might be feeling.
 - *"Your sister cried when you said those unkind words to her. How might she be feeling?"*
 - *"When your friend didn't get to take their turn, how do you think they were feeling?"*
 - *"When you said that to me, how do you think that made me feel?"*

Trap Avoid letting the question turn into an accusation. Remember to stay calm and that the goal of the question is to help the child uncover feelings.

Step 2. **Teach** New Skills by Interactive Modeling

- Understanding your own feelings and behaviors when your child behaves inappropriately is a great way to start. It will help you understand what they are learning to do.
- Model behaviors (and your children will notice and learn!).
- Teach positive behaviors. Children need to learn the positive behavior that can replace an inappropriate behavior.
- Create a calm down plan. *"What helps you feel better when you're sad, mad, or hurt?"*

- Practice deep breathing to calm down.
- Brainstorm coping strategies and make a list together, such as hugging a pillow, reading a favorite book, walking outside, getting a glass of water, or listening to music.
- Work on your family feelings vocabulary. Use specific feelings words to describe your state of mind and help your child describe theirs.
- Teach assertive communication through I-messages such as “*I feel _____ (insert feeling word) when you _____ (name the words or actions that upset you) because _____.*” “*I feel sad when you say hurtful things to your brother. It hurts his feelings.*”

Tip Deep breathing actually removes the chemical that has flowed over your brain so that you regain access to your creativity, language, and logic versus staying stuck in your primal brain. Practicing deep breathing with your child can offer them a powerful tool to use anytime, anywhere when they feel overcome with heated emotions.

Tip Play feelings guessing games with the family. At a meal, share facial expressions showing a range of emotions and guess which they are.

Trap Though at times it can feel like it, there are no “bad” emotions. Every feeling is a vital message from ourselves. Because feelings are an instant interpretation, we always have the opportunity to reinterpret our response.

Step 3. **Practice** to Grow Skills, Confidence, and Develop Habits

- Use “Show me...” statements like “*Show me how you are able to make things better with your sister.*”
- Accept feelings (even ones you don't like!): “*I hear you're upset. What can you do to help yourself feel better? Would your calm down space help you feel better?*”
- Offer limited and authentic choices. “*Could you talk to her directly or write her a note?*”
- Recognize effort: “*I notice how you went back to your sister to talk to her after you fought to make things better. That's how you heal the relationship.*”
- Proactively remind: “*Remember what helps you feel better? What can you do?*”

Tip After a tough day, your child may be internally beating themselves up for what they did and said earlier. So end the day with love. They need to hear that you love them NO MATTER WHAT on those days in particular.

Trap Don't move on or nag when children are angry or upset. Children often need more time to calm down, regain perspective, and move on. Be sure to wait long enough for your child to show you they can take steps to self-manage. Your waiting could make all the difference in whether they are able to do what you need them to do.

Step 4. **Support** Your Child's Development and Success

- Ask key questions to support their skills: *"You are going to see Julie today. How will you let her know that you are sorry for your words yesterday?"*
- Learn about development. Each new age and stage will present differing challenges and along with them, stress, frustration, and anger.
- Promote an "I can" belief. Children need to hear that you believe in their ability to mend their relationships.
- Follow through on logical consequences to repair harm when needed.

Step 5. **Recognize** Effort and Quality to Foster Motivation

- Notice even small successes: *"I noticed you made up with your sister even before I said anything. That's the way to be a big sister."*
- Recognize small steps along the way.
- Build celebrations into your routine. Consider a hug when an effort to repair harm has been made.

Tip Be specific. "Good job" seems not to carry much meaning. However, a specific compliment about a pointed behavior -- *"You took some deep breaths when you got frustrated. Love seeing that!"* -- can promote more of the same.

Trap If you focus only on outcomes -- *"You didn't argue with your sister today"* -- you miss the chance to influence the process. Better to say -- *"You were helpful today. I appreciate that."*

Trap Avoid bribes. A bribe is a promise for a behavior, while praise is special attention after the behavior. While bribes may work in the short term, praise grows lasting motivation for good behavior and effort. For example, instead of saying "If you don't argue with your sister, you'll get extra game time" (which is a bribe), try recognizing the behavior after. *"You were helpful in the store today. I really appreciate that!"*

Celebrate yourself for making it your parenting priority to work on cultivating the social and emotional skills that are most critical for your child's success today and in their future!

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