

ARE YOU SAYING SORRY TOO MUCH?

Saying sorry, being sorry, is a personal favourite topic of conversation, probably because of my English-ness, but it's a subject of importance to all interested in emotional and social intelligence. Do you say sorry too often, or hardly at all? Saying sorry takes humility, compassion, self-awareness, empathy, a desire for forgiveness and connection, and an acceptance that one can be wrong. It's important to say it when we have hurt others, when we have let others down, and when we have made a mistake.

For those of us for whom it can be quite a challenge to utter the words, 'I'm sorry,' it may help to simply practice saying them over and over again to yourself. And ask yourself, 'am I practising empathy?' These two (actually 3:) words have the power to change, not just how others feel but also *you* - to make you feel calm, to enhance your self-esteem, to make you feel lighter, happier and connected to others. And others too are drawn to forgiveness, they are drawn to people who can admit their mistakes and drawn to people who will offer them empathy. It's a 'win win'. Try it.

But saying sorry often, can have another side, surprisingly, a darker side; it can also imply low self-esteem, a drive to avoid connection or a fear of conflict and anger. When sorry is said to avoid connection, you may be attempting to end a conversation, to avoid becoming more intimate or close. It appears as if you are warm because you are so ready to say sorry but actually somewhere underneath you may actually be quite cold, not wanting close friends or intimates. And in these circumstances, you may be struggling with low self-esteem, i.e. you feel easily rejected, you take a lot of things personally, you feel inferior to others, and/or you don't know how to disagree with others without feeling bad about yourself or angry with them. So, it's easier to say 'sorry' outwardly, whilst inwardly you mean 'let's not talk anymore because this is difficult for me.'

When should you say sorry?

When you hurt someone

You actually only need to say sorry when you have done something wrong, whether deliberately or by mistake. When you have done

something wrong - one might say- 'I'm sorry I hurt you, that was unkind of me'; when you hurt someone by accident/mistake - 'I'm sorry I knocked into you'; and even when its inadvertent - 'I didn't mean to hurt you but I'm sorry I did.'

When we want to offer empathy

Also, we say sorry to offer empathy and understanding. 'I'm sorry to hear that your father passed away'. 'I'm sorry that you are sad. 'I'm sorry you feel that way.' Be careful with this one because not everyone uses sorry in this way and it is often misunderstood and confused with making an apology, and then you may find yourself in a corner objecting, 'No! I'm not apologizing, I'm just sorry you feel that way about me...':)

Anger deflater

Sometimes we say sorry, so that we can deflate anticipated anger, (our own and others), it's a good and useful tactic when faced with an angry or unknown person. You are on an underground train and somebody knocks into you, you say sorry and you say that, in case, they think it was you. But, acting out of fear of igniting someone's anger is also not the most fulfilling communication when it's someone you care for, work with or spend a lot of time with. Tell them instead, 'hey, look I'm afraid of your anger', or, 'I struggle with conflict', instead of bowing down with an apology. Sometimes, we say sorry because we want to avoid conflict. It is good to be a conflict avoider but in order to seek further connection (if that is indeed what you want or need), talk about it further, when the person is calm.

When not to say sorry

Don't say sorry to make yourself small.

Don't say it the way we English often to - which is saying it on behalf of the other. Someone bumps into you and you say sorry. The more you say sorry when it's not fitting, the more you reduce yourself, make yourself small, and the more you are likely to feel resentment. Try, 'excuse me' instead.

The alternative - Try gratitude

Instead of saying 'So sorry for the trouble I caused', which is something I said yesterday :) in response to someone when they ended up doing more for me than expected. One can say instead, 'Thanks for the time you took to help me'. Try it. When you apologise for the trouble you caused you don't make the other person feel good about what they did, you make them feel bad for you, you make them feel sorry for you. You inspire sympathy. And in turn you make yourself small. Better to show the person you appreciate their time and make them feel useful, resourceful, helpful and/or appreciated. And, in turn you show you are equal to the other not smaller.

Yes, sorry is important but don't belittle yourself, don't apologise for having an effect on others, we all have an effect on each other, notice it and appreciate what others do for you instead of apologising for existing, almost.

If you are interested in Self Development, contact me to talk about counselling. Farah Naz 2018