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Last week I wrote that children should be taught to seek forgiveness by saying, “I apologize. Will you forgive me?” The child should have a repentant heart when he asks for forgiveness. In a fairy tale world, that would happen soon after the incident and with no resistance on the part of the child.

In reality, the child may not be ready (repentant) or may be embarrassed about apologizing. It is a wise parent who can handle the issue without turning it into a power struggle. I have seen a parent standing over a child demanding an apology. All involved parties and some onlookers were standing by waiting for the resistant child to acquiesce to his parent’s demands. Of course he was trying to protect his ego by standing firm.

Much will depend on what you have previously taught the child about forgiveness and about being obedient to God’s Word. One of the foundational Scriptures a young child should memorize is Luke 6:37c: “Forgive, and you will be forgiven.” Teach your child that he should forgive simply because Jesus says that it is the right thing to do.

After the offending incident, talk to your child about what he has done and give him time to get his heart right about the matter before you push for an apology.

Sometimes apologizing, especially to an adult, is very difficult because of shyness. My daughter gives her sons the option of writing a note of apology to an adult if she feels that they are repentant, but shy. Since note writing takes time, they usually opt for a direct apology. However, giving them the option of how they want to apologize empowers them.

It is difficult to learn to humble oneself and ask for forgiveness. Being difficult does not mean that it should not happen. When the incident involves two children, it should be done directly despite the embarrassment. Sometimes, even though the parent has talked with the child, he is not repentant. I suggest that he be allowed some time alone to think about the situation. When he is ready, he can go to the child and ask for forgiveness.

Does it seem that I am making this into a big issue? It is a big issue because of the damage done to adult relationships in which one party does not know how to apologize.