

Start With Sorry – High School Lesson Plan (Years 7–10)

Apology and repair are essential for healthy relationships, resilience, and emotional wellbeing—skills that are a critical part of student development in secondary schools.

Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- Reflect on why apologies matter for individuals, relationships, and community.
- Recognise what makes an apology meaningful (vs. empty words).
- Practise giving and receiving apologies in real-world scenarios, including online/digital spaces.
- Build confidence in repairing relationships after conflict or mistake.

Lesson Outline:

1. Introduction: The Power & Challenge of Apology

Discussion prompts:

- Why do people find it hard to say sorry—even when they know they’re wrong?
- When have you received (or given) a memorable apology? How did it feel?
- Think-Pair-Share: Students reflect and share short examples.

2. Why Apologise?

- Mini-presentation: Share science and real stories showing that apology reduces stress, repairs trust, and even benefits brain health.
- Highlight that respectful relationships and student wellbeing are core to school culture.

3. What Makes an Apology Real?

Group brainstorm: “What’s the difference between a real apology and a fake one?”

Introduce the 5 Steps of a Real Apology Poster:

Clearly say what happened.

Take responsibility—no excuses.

Say sorry and mean it.

Offer to make things right.

Listen to their feelings.



4. Scenario Role-Play and Analysis

Small groups: Choose real-world scenarios (e.g. posting something hurtful online, breaking trust in a friendship, arguing in a sporting team) and role-play both the apology and the response.

Feedback: Group discusses—What did the apologise do well? How did the person receiving the apology react? What would improve it?

Sample scenarios (choose or adapt):

- You snap at a friend during exam stress.
- You leave someone out of a group chat.
- You spread a rumour without checking facts.
- You make a joke that offends someone's identity.

5. Apology & Repair Online

Discussion: How is apologising online different from face-to-face? What makes a digital apology feel real or fake?

Quick task: Students draft how they'd apologise over text, DM, or in person for one scenario.

6. Personal Reflection: Repair In Real Life (Homework/Individual Task)

Journal prompts:

- Write about a time you apologised (or wish you had). What was hard—and what helped?
- What's the biggest barrier to saying sorry in your peer group?
- Where could a real apology make a difference in your school/community right now?

Optional: Set a practical class challenge—use an authentic apology in the next week, and share (anonymously) what happened.

7. Creating a Respectful Classroom Culture

Collaborate on a “Class Apology Charter” (e.g. “We will take responsibility, repair, and listen when things go wrong”).

Display the charter in the classroom.



Assessment & Extension

Participation in discussion and role-play
Personal reflection in journal entries
Contribution to Class Apology Charter

Extension:

Students research examples of public apologies (sports, politics, media) and analyse what was effective/what could have been improved, connecting these insights back to their own lives.

Journal Prompts Handout:

“Describe a time a real apology changed a friendship or situation.”
“What makes apologising hard for teens?”
“When have you forgiven someone, and how did it feel?”

Teacher Tips

Model real apology when you make a mistake as a teacher.
Use current issues or media examples relevant to teens for discussion.
Acknowledge the courage it takes to apologise, especially in adolescence.
Emphasise repair, not shame, and encourage students to see apology as a strength.

Here are sample scenario scripts and a prompt for digital apology practice.

1. Snapping at a Friend During Exam Stress

Scenario:

Jordan is feeling overwhelmed with upcoming exams and snaps at their friend Riley during lunchtime.

In Person Apology:

Jordan (apologiser): "Riley, I'm really sorry for snapping at you earlier. I was stressed about exams and took it out on you, and that wasn't fair."

Riley (receiver): "Thanks for apologising. I get that exams are tough."

Jordan: "Can I make it up to you? Maybe we can study together?"

2. Leaving Someone Out of a Group Chat

Scenario:

Mia and others created a group chat for a school project but left Daniel out by mistake.

In Person Apology:

Mia: "Daniel, I realised we left you out of the chat. That was thoughtless, and I'm sorry."

Daniel: "I noticed, and it made me feel excluded."

Mia: "It wasn't intentional, and I've added you now. Is there anything I can do to help you catch up?"

3. Spreading a Rumour Without Checking Facts

Scenario:

Taylor heard something about Sam and told others without knowing if it was true.

In Person Apology:

Taylor: "Sam, I'm really sorry for telling others that rumour. I didn't check if it was true, and I know that hurt you."

Sam: "Yeah, it did. I wish you'd asked me first."

Taylor: "You're right. I'll tell people I got it wrong and make sure it stops here."

4. Making a Joke That Offends Someone's Identity

Scenario:

Alex made a joke in class that unintentionally offended Priya's cultural background.

In Person Apology:

Alex: "Priya, I'm sorry for the joke I made in class. I didn't think about how it would make you feel, and I can see now it was insensitive."

Priya: "It was hurtful, to be honest."

Alex: "Thank you for telling me. I'll be more careful and respectful."

5. Apology & Repair Online

Discussion Points

Apologising online can feel less personal; words might be misread or seem less sincere.

A digital apology can be easy to ignore or misinterpret.

Including specifics, showing genuine understanding, and offering to talk in person can make a digital apology feel more real.

Quick Student Task

Prompt:

Choose one of the above scenarios. Write a short apology as if you were sending it by text or DM. Then, write how you'd say the same apology in person.

Example: (Text or DM for the "group chat" scenario):

"Hey Daniel, I just realised we totally left you out of the group chat for the project. I'm really sorry—it wasn't intentional. I've added you now, and I'll send you all the info you missed. Let me know if you want to chat about it."

In Person:

"Daniel, I'm sorry we forgot you in the chat. It was a mistake, and I hope you'll join us now. I can help you catch up if you want."

Teaching Tip:

Ask students: Which version feels more genuine? What helps make an apology online feel sincere?

These resources are designed to help students develop both face-to-face and digital apology skills, supporting emotional literacy and respectful peer relationships.

“5 Steps of a Real Apology”

1. Say what happened.

2. Take responsibility.

3. Say sorry and mean it.

4. Ask or offer to repair.

Listen to their response.