

You've Offended Someone—Now What?

Let's face it: Most of us don't want to hear that we've done something wrong. We don't want to admit that we've hurt someone with our words or actions. But when we speak 16,000 or more words a day, we're bound to offend people more easily than we'd like to admit.

So, how do you react when you've offended someone? Here are some common reactions, as well as solutions, for handling this kind of conflict:

1. We become defensive. The easiest way to avoid having the blame put on us is to push that blame onto someone else. So when we've offended someone, our initial reaction is to become defensive and deflect that blame onto the very person we've offended. We say things like, "If you weren't so sensitive," or, "If you could've just understood me better."

Rather than defend yourself, it's often best to simply own up to the mistake. Moving forward sometimes requires letting go of your pride and apologizing in humility. If pride is a constant struggle for you, then you may also want to read through my blog post "Fight for Your Marriage, Not Your Pride."

2. We become frustrated. Oftentimes we offend people unintentionally. It can happen in a number of ways: by taking a joke too far, causing them to feel uncomfortable in a group setting, or even through a lack of action, such as forgetting their birthday or not offering to help set the table for dinner.

When the offense is unintentional, it's natural to become frustrated. We don't want to apologize for something we didn't mean to do. But calming down and saying we're sorry is often

the best way to right an unintentional wrong. If you find yourself offending others with your words, you may want to check out my blog post “5 Toxins of the Tongue That Can Poison Your Marriage.”

3. We ignore. When we offend people in ways we view as small, ignoring the incident seems like an easy way out. We convince ourselves that what we said or did couldn't have been *that* offensive, at least not enough to deserve an apology.

However, we must keep in mind that people are different from us and, therefore, get offended in different ways. Instead of ignoring the situation by pushing it under the rug, make an effort to talk through the conflict with the person you've offended. Not only will it heal your relationship now, but it will also give you insight to that person's personality and perhaps save you from offending them the same way in the future.

4. We complain to someone else. More often than not, we somehow find reason to talk to anyone other than the person we've offended. Rather than go to the source of the conflict, we all too quickly find ourselves complaining to our spouse or friend.

Unfortunately, this complaining usually consists of us justifying our own actions or putting down the person we've already offended. Until we face the conflict at its core by addressing the person we've hurt with our actions or words, the issue will remain unresolved. So be slow to gossip about the situation to others and quick to address the conflict with the one you've offended.

How do you react when you've offended someone? How can you respond differently in the future? I'd appreciate you leaving your thoughts and experiences in a comment below.

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