

KEY WORK SESSION PLAN: UNDERSTANDING APOLOGIES & EMOTIONAL GROWTH

SETTING: CHILDREN'S CARE HOME

Objective:

To help the boys develop an understanding of apologies, recognising that apologising is a brave and important action in repairing relationships and building emotional resilience.

Psychological Learning Models Incorporated:

- **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT):** Focus on the connection between thoughts, emotions, and behaviours.
- **Social Learning Theory (Bandura):** Use of role models and imitation to encourage appropriate behaviour.
- **Growth Mindset (Dweck):** Reinforce that learning to apologise is part of personal growth, not a sign of weakness.

Duration:

35-45 minutes

SESSION BREAKDOWN:

1. Welcome & Safe Space Introduction (5 minutes)

- **Psychology Model: Social Learning Theory (Bandura)**
 - Begin by creating a calm, accepting atmosphere. As the facilitator, model calm behaviour and positive body language.
 - Explain the focus of the session: "Today we are going to talk about how we can be brave and strong by saying sorry when things go wrong. Apologising is not easy, but it's important and shows that we care."
 - Reassure that this is a safe space where no one is judged for sharing their feelings or experiences.

2. Discussion: What is an Apology? (5 minutes)

- **Psychology Model: Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)**
 - **Ask guiding questions** to engage their cognitive processing:
 - "What do you think it means to apologise?"
 - "Why do you think people say sorry?"
 - Encourage reflection on how thoughts (e.g., "I did something wrong") lead to feelings (e.g., "I feel bad") and then behaviour (e.g., "I should apologise").
- Emphasise that **apologising is a brave act**. When we say sorry, we're not just fixing something, but showing others that we are strong enough to admit when we've done something wrong.

3. Understanding Emotions & Empathy (10 minutes)

- **Interactive Activity: Emotion Cards**
 - **Psychology Model: Social Learning & CBT**
Show cards with different emotions (happy, sad, angry, scared).
 - Ask the boys to **identify** how they feel when someone apologises to them and how they feel when someone does not apologise.
 - Relate the emotions back to the **behaviours** they trigger: "When we feel hurt, sometimes we don't want to talk, or we get angry. When we apologise, it can make both people feel better."
 - **Guided Reflection:** "Saying sorry can change someone's emotions from sad to happy. What does that say about the power of an apology?"

4. The Brave Apology: Breaking Down the Steps (10 minutes)

- **Psychology Model: Growth Mindset**
 - Explain that apologising takes **bravery** and that learning to apologise is part of becoming emotionally stronger.
 - **Break down the apology into three simple steps:**
 1. **Say what you're sorry for:** "I'm sorry for..."
 2. **Explain why it was wrong:** "I did this, and I know it made you feel..."
 3. **Ask how to make it right:** "What can I do to make things better?"
 - Role-play with a volunteer or among the group to **model the behaviour**, emphasising how **strong** and **courageous** it is to admit when we've made a mistake.

5. Activity: My Apology Card (10 minutes)

- **Psychology Model: Social Learning & Growth Mindset**
 - Each boy is given paper and colouring materials to create their own "Brave Apology Card."
 - Encourage them to **think of a time** when they needed to apologise but didn't, or a time when they did apologise.
 - They can draw or write down how that made them feel, and how saying sorry would have helped. Emphasise that this is a chance to reflect on how **strong** they felt when they did something brave.
 - Reinforce the idea that learning to apologise makes them emotionally **stronger** and is part of **growing** as a person.

6. Reflection & Reinforcement (5 minutes)

- **Psychology Model: Growth Mindset**
 - As a group, discuss:
 - "What did you learn today about being brave?"
 - "How can we use what we learned when we need to say sorry next time?"
 - Provide positive feedback for their participation, emphasising that everyone makes mistakes and that **learning to apologise** is an important part of **personal growth**.
 - Encourage the boys to keep practising their apology skills and remind them that each time they do, they are becoming stronger emotionally.

Additional Considerations for Specific Needs:

- **For ASD & PDA:** Use visuals and clear, concise language. Break down each step into manageable chunks.
- **For ADHD:** Incorporate frequent movement or a change of activity, such as standing during the role-play or using a fidget object during discussion times.
- **For ODD & Trauma:** Be patient and non-confrontational. Reinforce autonomy by giving them the **choice** to participate in ways that feel safe for them (drawing vs. speaking).

Materials Needed:

- Emotion cards
- Paper, crayons/markers
- Visual aids for steps of the apology

STORY: THE BRAVE APOLOGY OF JAKE AND MAX

There once were two boys, Jake and Max, who lived in the same care home. They were around the same age and liked a lot of the same things—football, video games, and building forts in the garden. In many ways, they were very similar, but in one important way, they were very different. Jake found it easy to talk about his feelings, while Max found it much harder. If something upset Max, he didn't talk about it; he'd just storm off, slam a door, or shout at anyone who got too close.

One warm summer afternoon, something happened that changed everything for Jake and Max.

The boys had been in the garden, playing a game of football. As usual, they'd both started off having fun, laughing and shouting as they kicked the ball back and forth. The ball flew across the lawn as they raced each other to see who could score the most goals. Jake was fast, but Max was stronger, and the game quickly became more competitive than either of them had expected.

As the game went on, Max's frustration started to grow. He wasn't scoring as many goals as Jake, and every time Jake got another point, Max felt his anger bubbling up inside. He didn't like to lose, especially not to someone he thought he should be able to beat. His fists clenched, and his breathing became heavier, but Jake didn't notice. He was still playing and laughing like it was just a friendly game.

Then it happened.

Max, in a moment of anger, decided he had had enough of losing. As Jake ran past him with the ball, Max stuck out his foot, tripping him. Jake went tumbling to the ground, landing hard on his knee. For a moment, everything was silent.

Jake stayed on the ground, stunned, as he felt the pain throbbing in his knee. Tears stung his eyes, but he didn't cry. He just stared up at Max, who stood frozen, realising what he had done.

Max's heart pounded in his chest. He knew he had messed up. He hadn't meant to hurt Jake—he just wanted the game to stop, to make things feel fair again. But now, looking at his friend on the ground, he felt a wave of guilt wash over him. He wanted to say something, to explain, to apologise, but the words wouldn't come. His mouth felt dry, and the familiar feeling of frustration was taking over again.

Instead of saying sorry, Max turned away, stormed off, and went inside the house without a word.

For the rest of the day, the air between Jake and Max was thick with tension. Jake's knee was sore, but more than that, he felt confused and hurt. Why had Max tripped him? They were just playing a game. And why didn't Max say sorry? He thought they were friends, but friends don't do things like that and then pretend it never happened.

Max, on the other hand, couldn't shake the feeling of guilt, but his frustration kept rising every time he thought about it. He told himself that Jake was probably overreacting, that it wasn't even that big of a deal. Still, deep down, Max knew he should have apologised. But he was scared. What if Jake didn't forgive him? What if saying sorry made him look weak?

The rest of the day passed in a blur, and that night, Max lay in bed, staring at the ceiling, unable to sleep. The more he thought about what had happened, the more he realised that apologising didn't mean he was weak. It didn't mean that he was giving up control or losing the game. Apologising would mean that he was brave enough to admit he'd made a mistake.

He tossed and turned, wondering if Jake would even want to hear his apology. But the next morning, as the sun rose, Max decided. He was going to say sorry. Not because anyone told him to, not because it would make the

awkwardness go away, but because he wanted to make things right. He cared about his friendship with Jake, and he didn't want one bad moment to ruin it.

The next morning, Max found Jake in the garden again. He was sitting on a bench, his knee wrapped in a bandage, watching the birds fly by. Max hesitated for a moment, feeling his stomach twist nervously. But then he took a deep breath and walked over to Jake.

"Hey," Max said quietly, sitting down next to him.

Jake glanced at him but didn't say anything. Max could feel the weight of his silence.

"I... I wanted to talk about what happened yesterday," Max began, his voice shaking slightly. "I shouldn't have tripped you. I was mad, but that doesn't make it okay. I know you got hurt, and I feel really bad about that."

Jake didn't say anything for a moment, and Max's heart pounded in his chest. Then, finally, Jake turned to him.

"Why didn't you say sorry yesterday?" Jake asked, his voice soft but full of the confusion he'd been carrying since the incident.

Max swallowed hard. "I don't know," he admitted. "I guess... I was scared. I didn't want to look weak or stupid. But now I realise that not saying sorry was worse. It made things worse."

Jake looked down at his bandaged knee, then back at Max. "It really hurt, you know," he said, his voice still quiet. "Not just my knee, but... the fact that you just walked away."

Max nodded, guilt tugging at him again. "I know. And I'm really, really sorry for that. I was wrong."

For a moment, the two boys sat in silence, the awkwardness hanging in the air. But then, something shifted. Jake nodded slowly.

"Thanks for saying sorry," Jake said. "It means a lot. And... I get it. I've felt scared to say sorry before too. It's not easy."

Max felt a wave of relief wash over him. "Yeah, it's not. But I'm glad I did."

Jake smiled faintly, and Max smiled back. The tension between them seemed to fade, replaced by something lighter, something like understanding.

From that day on, Jake and Max's friendship grew even stronger. They still had their arguments, and sometimes they still got frustrated with each other. But now, they knew that saying sorry wasn't a sign of weakness—it was a sign of strength. It was a way to show that they cared about each other, and that they were brave enough to make things right when they went wrong.

In the end, Max learned that **the bravest thing you can do isn't winning or never making mistakes—it's being able to say sorry when you do.**

(Contact me on my website for a shorter version of the story or adapt it yourself according to the children you work with's needs).

KEY WORK SESSION PLAN: BRAVERY IN APOLOGISING & EMOTIONAL GROWTH

SETTING: CHILDREN'S CARE HOME

Objective:

To help the boys understand that apologising is a brave act and an important step in personal growth, using **Motivational Interviewing (MI) techniques** to foster self-reflection and intrinsic motivation.

Psychological Learning Models Incorporated:

- **Motivational Interviewing (MI):** Encouraging self-exploration, building motivation, and guiding them toward understanding the value of apologising.
- **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT):** Exploring thoughts, feelings, and behaviours related to apology.
- **Growth Mindset (Dweck):** Reinforcing the idea that apologising is a skill that can be developed over time.

Duration:

35-45 minutes

Session Breakdown:

1. Welcome & Safe Space Introduction (5 minutes)

- **MI Technique: Open-Ended Questions & Reflective Listening**
 - Greet the boys with a calm and open tone. Start by saying, "Today we're going to explore what it means to apologise and why it can be a really brave thing to do."
 - Open with a **motivational question**: "How do you feel when someone apologises to you after they've done something wrong?"
 - **Reflect** their responses back to them: "So, it sounds like you feel better when someone says sorry, even though it might not fix everything right away. Is that right?"
- Set a supportive atmosphere by **affirming their contributions**: "Thank you for sharing that. It's really helpful to hear how you feel."

2. Exploring the Concept of Apology (10 minutes)

- **MI Technique: Eliciting Change Talk**
 - Begin with an open-ended question: "What do you think happens when we don't apologise? How do you think that makes others feel?"
 - Allow the boys to explore their thoughts without pushing for a specific answer. Use reflective listening to **draw out their feelings and beliefs**: "You're saying that when we don't apologise, the person might stay upset, and that can make things worse?"
 - **Encourage change talk** by focusing on the benefits of apologising: "When we say sorry, we show that we're strong enough to admit we made a mistake. How do you think apologising might help someone else feel better? And how might it help you feel better too?"
- **Emphasise** that apologising is a **brave** action: "It takes a lot of courage to say sorry because it shows that we care about others and want to make things right."

3. Connecting Emotions to Apologies (10 minutes)

- **MI Technique: Affirmations & Reflective Listening**
 - **Interactive Activity: Emotion Cards**
Use emotion cards (happy, sad, angry, etc.) and ask:
 - "How do you feel when someone doesn't say sorry after doing something wrong?"
 - "How do you feel when someone does apologise?"
 - **Affirm their emotions:** "It's okay to feel upset when someone doesn't apologise. That's a natural reaction. It shows that you care about what's right and wrong."
- **Explore the personal impact:** "When we apologise, it can help us feel better too, because we know we're doing the right thing. Does anyone here remember a time when they said sorry, and it helped them feel better?"

4. Understanding Apology as a Brave Choice (10 minutes)

- **MI Technique: Decisional Balance & Evoking Motivation**
 - Present the idea of apology as a **choice** that can make a positive difference. Ask:
"What are some reasons why it's hard to apologise? And what are some reasons why it's a good thing to apologise?"
 - Write their answers in two columns to visually demonstrate the pros and cons.
 - **Guide them** toward seeing the benefits of apologising without forcing them to change: "So even though it might feel uncomfortable or scary, it sounds like apologising can make things better between you and the other person. What do you think?"
- **Reinforce the bravery aspect:** "When we admit we've made a mistake, it shows how strong we are. Apologising isn't about weakness; it's about being brave and taking responsibility."
- **Steps of Apology** (without using the word 'promise'):
 1. **Acknowledge what you're sorry for:** "I'm sorry for..."
 2. **Explain why it was wrong:** "I understand that it upset you because..."
 3. **Ask how to make it right:** "What can I do to help you feel better about this?"
 4. **Tell them that you will be more mindful in the future:** "I will try and avoid doing this in the future."

5. Activity: The Brave Apology Card (10 minutes)

- **MI Technique: Supporting Self-Efficacy**
 - **Creative task:** Give each boy paper and markers to create their own **Brave Apology Card**.
 - Encourage them to **reflect** on a time when they might have needed to apologise but didn't, or when they did apologise.
 - Ask them to **write or draw** how saying sorry made them feel or could have made them feel. This helps build their belief in their own ability to apologise.
- **Affirm their efforts:** "This card shows that you know how to take a brave step forward. Each time you practice, you're becoming stronger at dealing with difficult situations."

6. Reflection & Reinforcement (5 minutes)

- **MI Technique: Summarising & Building Commitment**
 - Wrap up the session by asking:
 - "What did you learn about apologising today?"
 - "How do you think you could use this in the future when things don't go as planned?"
 - **Summarise** their reflections: "It sounds like everyone agrees that apologising, though hard, is an important and brave thing to do. And it helps us feel better and grow stronger."

- **Positive reinforcement:** “Remember, no one gets everything right all the time. The brave part is being able to say sorry when we do make mistakes. Each time you practise, you’re showing how strong you really are.”
-

Additional Considerations for Specific Needs:

- **For ASD & PDA:** Simplify the language and provide visual aids. Allow them to participate in ways that feel comfortable, like drawing instead of verbal responses.
- **For ADHD:** Keep the activities dynamic, with opportunities for physical movement during the role-playing or card-making.
- **For ODD & Trauma:** Use non-judgemental language and avoid pressuring them to apologise if they’re not ready. Highlight the choice and control they have in the process.

Materials Needed:

- Emotion cards
- Paper, crayons/markers
- Visual aids for steps of the apology