## http://www.etia.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/images-4.jpgCleaning Up Our Mistakes With Our Children

[By Judith Richardson - Instructor Trainer (VIC)](http://www.etia.org/domains/etiaorg/?email_id=23&user_id=32&urlpassed=aHR0cDovL3d3dy5ldGlhLm9yZy9kb21haW5zL2V0aWFvcmcvYXV0aG9yL2pyaWNoYXJkc29uLw%3D%3D&controller=stats&action=analyse&wysija-page=1&wysijap=subscriptions) for **P**arent **E**ffectiveness **T**raining Program P.E.T.

One of the elements of the Personal Empowerment Program that I bring into P.E.T. is the concept of “Cleaning up with your children.” From time to time all parents make mistakes, say things they regret in the heat of the moment – this is very normal. Even after you have mastered the PET skills you will always have times when you act or speak in reaction. However what matters more to your children than the fact that you have spoken in anger or acted inappropriately is the fact that you take responsibility for your actions and apologise.

Some parents when first encountering the notion of apologising to their children have concerns. They imagine that their children will in some way take advantage of them or have some ‘power’ over them and start to “rule the roost”. But in truth quite the opposite happens. Children actually respect their parents more and they mature through the process. They feel taken care of and respected in turn and have the sense of really mattering. This kind of modelling and interaction contributes to building the emotional intelligence of our children.

Children who are treated in this way are much more likely to apologise when they too act in a way that causes others distress. They learn it is safe to apologise. It clearly demonstrates to children that we all react in ways that do not help us get our needs met but that in cleaning up and apologising we can repair this lapse in relationship. In fact research has shown that relationships where this happens are strengthened not weakened by the apology and a relationship of deeper trust is built.

And it is more than just saying a ‘sorry’. It must be heartfelt and authentic and what better way to disclose your feelings than in the form of and I-message. For example, “I want you to know I am sorry that I spoke loudly to you in that tone. I was upset about something else and I overreacted. I do not want to do this in my relationship with you because I love you.” You can see that it is more powerful to explain to your child why you are sorry and that you are saying sorry because you value the relationship and that you value communication that is ‘clean’. There is much learning for the receiver in this I-message as you can see. And of course we will be at this point always ready to active listen any response from our child that shows they need to be heard.

Whenever we *do not* clean up in this way we leave a residue between you and the other person that is carried forward to the next interaction. This is counterproductive to the ongoing health of the relationship and has a flow on effect. When we do clean up however the relationship is much warmer and stronger.

The other benefit from this is that your children will be more likely to apologise for their communication that is “off” with you. My children are very quick to apologise for their moods and I have in my keepsakes box some lovely “sorry notes” from over the years, some even elaborately decorated. What a wonderful life skill to have passed on to them.

And yes, cleaning up does take courage and yes it is worth it! Try it and you will see.

Warm regards Judith Richardson

Instructor Trainer Victoria