

7 Steps to Relationship Repair



1. **Recognize that you just externalized an internal discomfort:** The cause of the suffering you experience when there is a breakdown in the relationship can easily be explained away. You may believe that external events are responsible for the breakdown. Your intentions were good. Right? But consider that whatever happened 'out there' triggered something inside. Get curious about your internal experience and how you reacted to it.
2. **Acknowledge the breakdown your reaction caused:** You may be in the habit of ignoring your own maladaptive reactions to external triggers, hoping your relationship partners weren't affected, didn't notice, didn't care, or won't hold it against you. You may have a fear that acknowledging the breakdown may create more problems and that you lack the capacity to manage those problems. But deep down you know better. This kind of hiding creates even more internal tension and the next time you get triggered, your spring will release and cause even more damage.
3. **Rather than assuming you know how the other person was impacted, ask them:** You may be afraid that asking your relationship partner how your reactions impacted them will invite anger and criticism. If you fear conflict or criticism, it's going to be very hard to open that door. But if you don't give them an opportunity to tell you how your reactions affected them, you will find yourself trying to manage or solve the wrong problem. Your partner will probably feel misunderstood and controlled.
4. **Listen and reflect what you hear until the other feels understood by you.** This requires skillful presence. If you feel too hurt, scared, or offended by what has happened, you may find it almost impossible to really listen to your partner. If you notice you are unable to really listen in this way, ask for a pause. Let your partner know you are still triggered. Then practice whatever you know to do to calm your activation before you try again. You may need to ask someone for help to deactivate and calm your upset.
5. **Offer an authentic apology for the impact you had on your partner.** If you've gotten this far, you may feel guilty or ashamed for the breakdown. Even if the other person has been gracious, your inner critic may make this hard for you. An authentic apology requires sincere remorse for the breakdown and a willingness to avoid repeated breakdowns in the future. You may not believe you are capable of changing. Or you may not believe you are responsible for the breakdown. Either way, apologizing means taking responsibility for what happened. Fear of judgment, unfairness, or retaliation will block an authentic apology. Recognize if any of this is going on inside you. Don't attempt an apology until you have cleared the inner conflict. You may need to ask someone for help with this.
6. **Make an offer of repairs or amends:** If you clearly understand the impact your breakdown had on your partner, you can make an offer to make things right. This can be hard if you are afraid of being taken advantage of, or if you believe that they or someone else is responsible for the breakdown. When ready, consider what your reaction cost your partner. Lost trust? Lost security? Self-doubt? Emotional distress? This isn't about getting them to let you off the hook. Making amends means doing what it takes to restore the relationship. If your partner is able to honestly report the impact of your reaction, how to make the repair may be clear. If not, consider asking them what you can do to make it right.
7. **Recommit to the health of the relationship.** You've taken responsibility for the damage done, you have apologized and made amends. What's left is to honestly state your intentions to not repeat the offense. What have you learned by looking inside and taking responsibility? What needs to happen now to prevent it from happening again? Tell your partner what you are going to do to nurture the ongoing health of the relationship.