

## HOW TO HANDLE BROKEN AGREEMENTS

An important relationship skill is learning how to handle instances when we break agreements and how to handle instances when others break agreements with us.

1. Face the broken agreement and **acknowledge what actually happened** to all concerned parties. If you have broken an agreement, acknowledge it. A simple, “I didn’t do what I said I would do” is enough. If someone else has broken an agreement and not acknowledged it, do so simply: “I notice you didn’t do XXX which you agreed to do.” Apologies may make one or both of you feel better in the short term, BUT in the long term, they make one of you right and the other wrong and don’t address the broken agreement itself.
2. **Take responsibility for the broken agreement**, letting go of excuses, justifications, and defenses. Both ask yourselves, “What does this issue remind you of from the past?”; “How do I keep this issue going in the present?” and “What can I learn from this?” Review the following “reasons” to see if any of them are relevant:
  - You failed to communicate relevant facts when you made the agreement,
  - You failed to communicate relevant feelings when you made the agreement,
  - You made the agreement without a real intention of keeping it,
  - You made the agreement to please someone or to get someone off your back,
  - You failed to take something into consideration when you made the agreement,
  - Not keeping agreements is one of your patterns of self-sabotage.
3. **Feel your feelings** and communicate what is true for you, without blaming yourself or others. Typically you may feel sad about not having kept an agreement or scared about the consequences of your breaking the agreement. Ride the wave of feelings and let the concerned parties know. Again, communicate that simply, “I feel sad that I wasn’t at the performance” or “I feel scared and am imagining that you won’t trust me in the future”. Or if someone else has broken an agreement feel your feelings, which may be anger, “I feel angry that you weren’t here when you said you would be.” Communicate in an honest way facts and feelings that can’t be argued with.
4. **Listen to the responses and feelings from others**, hearing them out. Allow others to have their feelings and to express them. Don’t try to control people’s feelings. If you have broken an agreement, others may be angry at you. Allow them to express their anger. If you are communicating your feelings to others about an agreement they have broken, they may also have feelings. Listen without taking their feelings personally.
5. **Decide what can be done to address the consequences**. If something was broken, costs were incurred, make an agreement about what needs to be done. If it is something you agree to do, do it.
6. **Handle the source of the broken agreement so it doesn’t repeat**. This is the most important step of all. Look at why the agreement was broken. Identify your learning edge (see number 2 above) and re-commit to learning.