



5. What actions show I am taking responsibility?

6. How have I changed since the crime(s)?

7. What helped me change? (Treatment, school programs, classes, reading, realizations, etc.)

8. If someone did to me what I did, I would feel?

9. What was the ripple effect of the crime? Who else was affected?

## Questions for Offenders to Consider Prior to Writing an Apology Letter

Many criminal justice professionals seek to incorporate an understanding of victim impact into the overall apology process. In an ideal situation, offenders should attend victim impact awareness classes as a component of their programming to help them better understand the emotional, physical, financial and spiritual/religious impact of crime. In addition, information obtained from the victim through victim impact statements or pre-sentence investigations can be utilized — with permission from the victim — to help provide a foundation for offender apologies.

The following questions are designed to help make the offender apology process *meaningful* and *relevant* to the victim.

1. *Look at what happened from your victim's and/or victim's family point of view:*
  - a. If you were in his/her shoes, how would you feel?
  - b. Would you be angry or upset? Why?
  - c. Would you feel afraid? Why?
  - d. Would you feel any sense of "loss" because of what happened? Why?
  - e. Would you maybe think that "all people are 'bad' because of what one person did?
  - f. What would you want to happen? (Utilize any victim impact statement or PSI information to help the offender understand how the victim feels)
  
2. *Explain the victim's perspective. In general, here are some points:*
  - a. They don't expect bad things to happen to them because they try to live good lives.
  - b. They didn't *ask* to be victimized, and *they are never to blame* for what happened.
  - c. They may feel shock, anger, distress, and fear.
  - d. They may have other things going on in their lives that are stressful, and this is another bad thing to add to their problems.
  - e. They may now have a bad attitude toward (men/woman/whites/blacks/Latinos etc.) in general *because of what you did to them*.
  - f. If the victim has children, the children *may be frightened* and *have issues about trust* with others.
  
3. *Explain that every victim's experience and/or response to being victimized are different.*
  - a. If an offender is writing letters to multiple victims of multiple offenses, encourage the offender to respect each victim's experience by writing separate, distinct letters to each victim.
  - b. Apology letters should be unique to each victim. It is not appropriate for an offender to write a generic "one size fits all" letter.
  - c. It is acceptable for an offender to write one letter to the victim's entire surviving family (usually in homicide/loss of life cases). Offenders may address their letter "To the Family of..."

4. *Explain that some victims are so upset that they don't even want an apology letter:*

a. This is their right and it must be honored.

5. *In addition to explaining to your victim about your understanding of how you hurt him/her, he/she may be interested in what you think the impact of your offense is on:*

a. Your family.

b. Your neighborhood/community.

c. Yourself.

d. In your apology letter, think about explaining the impact on these three parties to your victim.

6. *Do you have any ideas about how you can make amends to your victim?*

a. Consider the apology letter *as one component of the accountability process*.

b. Remember, "actions speak louder than words."

c. Are there things you *have done*, or *can do* to improve you?