

## How to Take Accountability

Controversial television personality Lisa Rinna is known for telling others to “own it”. But what does “owning it” (or taking accountability) mean and why is it important?

When we take accountability, we accept responsibility for our actions. We exercise humility and grow in maturity by recognizing the mistake we have made, acknowledging the harm we have caused, and committing to doing better. Accountability has the potential to help us recover from our mistakes and repair our relationships.

This resource provides guidance on how to take accountability.

### Taking accountability involves

#### Critical self-reflection

- Critical self-reflection helps us identify our mistakes and the harm we have caused. While critically reflecting, it might be helpful for us to ask ourselves restorative questions, like the ones from the [International Institute of Restorative Practices](#):
  - What happened?
  - What was I thinking of at the time?
  - What have I thought about since?
  - Who has been affected by what I have done?
  - In what way have they been affected?
  - What do I think I need to do to make things right?

#### Active listening

- We should have a conversation with the impacted person and engage in active listening. Active listening is a serious, good-faith and non-judgmental attempt to listen to the impacted person, attempting to understand their perspective. Active listening involves not interrupting, providing social cues that we are listening and giving the impacted person our full attention.

#### Take full responsibility for our actions

- While speaking with the impacted person, we should take full responsibility for our actions. This involves two steps:
  - We should explicitly state what we did wrong, so the impacted person knows what we are taking accountability for.
  - We should accept constructive feedback.

### Empathy

- While speaking with the impacted person, we should extend empathy to them. By extending empathy, we validate their feelings and show remorse. Examples of empathetic statements include:
  - “That’s shitty.”
  - “That’s crappy.”
  - “That makes sense.”
  - “That sounds really difficult.”

### Correct our mistakes or avoid making them again

- While speaking with the impacted person, we should make a commitment to correct our mistakes or avoid making them again in the future.

### Common mistakes

Here are some common mistakes to avoid while taking accountability:

#### Try not to deflect

- Most conflicts are grey rather than black and white. In other words, both parties likely made mistakes or could have done things better. However, taking accountability does not involve responding to a criticism of our own behaviour with a criticism of someone else’s behaviour.

#### Avoid victim-blaming

- Sometimes we respond to criticism with statements like “it was just a joke”, “you took it the wrong way” or “you’re sensitive”. When we make statements like these, we imply there's nothing wrong with what we said or did. In fact, we imply the impacted person is to blame for “misinterpreting” our statement or actions.

#### Try not to only focus on our positive intentions

- Sometimes we say or do things with positive intentions, but our actions have negative impacts on others. While it’s ok to own our positive intentions, we should also take accountability for the negative impact of our actions.

#### Try not to use the words “probably” and “maybe”

- When we use “probably” and “maybe” as qualifiers, we do not take full responsibility for our actions. For example, we recommend saying, “I shouldn’t have done that” rather than “I probably shouldn’t have done that.”

#### Avoid using the word “but”

- The word “but” is usually followed by a criticism or an excuse, which counteracts any attempt we had made to take accountability. When we say “but” while attempting to take accountability, it has the same impact as an eraser. It erases everything we said before it.

### **Apologizing**

Taking accountability is a good first step, but it might not be enough. After taking accountability, we might need to offer the impacted person a thoughtful apology. A thoughtful apology is a gift to the hurt party, which allows them to explore the possibility of healing. For guidance on how to offer thoughtful apologies, check out the Student Conduct Office’s How to Apologize [video](#) and [written resource](#).