

The Stolen Generations' Apology – 7 Handy Mythbusters

There are many myths floating around about the *apology* so we've put together the following *mythbusters*. When you call up talk back radio, write to your local newspaper or are simply discussing the apology around the dinner table with family and friends, you can now consider yourself armed!

Use the following facts and arguments and help get everyone on board with the apology. The language used here is deliberately colloquial – which we hope will assist you to convince your fellow Australians. **Good luck!**

Myth 1 - I will not be made to feel guilt and shame for something I didn't do

Individual Australians are not responsible and should not feel guilty. 'Sorry' does not have to be an expression of shame or guilt. It can be an expression of empathy, as in 'I'm sorry to hear your friend died' or 'I'm sorry you got hurt in that car accident'. If people are still confused on this front, they might recall that several years ago, John Howard apologised on behalf of the nation to Vietnam Veterans for their poor treatment when they returned from the war.

In any case the apology will not be made on behalf of the Australian people but rather limited to the Australian Parliament.

Myth 2 – The Stolen Generations are a thing of the past

Of all the Stolen Generations myths, this is one of the biggest. The facts are that the removal of Indigenous children continued well into the 1960s and early 1970s. These people are still alive today and the effect on individuals, families and communities lasts a lifetime (and beyond).

Myth 3 - Saying sorry won't deliver better results in health, housing or education

Saying sorry is not of itself supposed to deliver health, housing and education. The fundamental flaw of this particular objection is that it implies Australia can't deliver practical outcomes while simultaneously delivering symbolic gestures. In other words, it suggests we can't walk and chew gum at the same time.

The government must also pursue practical measures to address Indigenous disadvantage, but that doesn't mean they shouldn't begin the process with a symbolic act.

Myth 4 - It'll cost us a fortune

Contrary to popular opinion, a national apology will have no legal impact on the capacity of members of the Stolen Generations to seek compensation. The ability of members of the Stolen Generations to pursue legal claims has existed since they were taken and nothing changes that. As a nation, an apology costs us nothing.

Myth 5 - The people who performed the removals thought they were doing the right thing

Good people do things that turn out to be wrong – but that doesn't mean they're excused from apologising. The majority of Indigenous children were removed from families not on the basis of the level of their care - but simply because of the colour of their skin. Many kids experienced physical, sexual and emotional abuse in their foster families and institutions *after* they were removed. For those people who believe that forced removal actually benefited the children – it's pretty difficult to find a member of the Stolen Generations who is happy about being denied the love of their parents and extended family.

Myth 6 - Saying sorry won't change the past

Sadly, it won't. But it will have a massive impact on the future – Stolen Generations members have already started healing since the promise to apologise was announced. An apology means an enormous amount to Indigenous people and the nation as a whole – and will cost us nothing.

Myth 7 - Saying sorry just leads people to think everything's been fixed

Whether you're for or against it, anyone who thinks that everything will be 'fixed' with the apology is kidding themselves. No-one is claiming that uttering the word 'sorry' is going to solve all the problems facing Indigenous Australians. Whatever your view on the apology, everyone agrees that practical actions still need to be taken. The apology is an important first step.

Who are the stolen generations? The term 'Stolen Generations' refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who were forcibly removed from their families and communities by policies of government, welfare and church authorities as children and placed into institutional care or with non-Indigenous foster families. The forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children began as early as the mid 1800s and continued until the 1970s.

(<http://www.reconcile.org.au/getsmart/pages/sorry/sorry--faq.php#1>)

The apology? A central recommendation of the 1997 'Bringing Them Home' report was the need for a national apology to those individuals and their families and communities affected by past policies of removal. Members of the Stolen Generations have indicated that recognition by the Government that the policies were wrong would help in addressing the trauma and suffering that they have experienced. The need for a national apology is also regarded as an important component of the broader reconciliation process between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. (<http://www.antar.org.au/content/view/112/1/>)

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