

Using “I” Statements to Communicate Effectively

Objective

To use “I” statements to express your wants, needs, and feelings in your relationships.

You Should Know

You might have trouble communicating what you want and need to those who are important to you. If you are not communicating clearly, you may blame the person you are talking to for the problem, saying things like:

“You never pay attention to me when I talk.”

“You just don’t understand me.”

These “you” statements blame the communication problem on the other person. Unfortunately, “you” statements likely make the listener feel defensive and your communication breaks down further. What if you take responsibility for your communication by making “I” statements? This exercise is designed to show you how to do this.

What You Should Do

It is possible to express yourself, resolve conflicts, and get what you want in your relationships by using “I” statements. When you use “I” statements, you are speaking assertively from your own experience and taking responsibility for your own thoughts and feelings.

When you revise your “you” statements into “I” statements, you can accurately describe what you want, or how the other person’s behavior affects you.

For example:

Instead of: “You’re always yelling at me!”

You could say: “I feel upset when you yell at me. Can we talk calmly, please?”

Instead of: “You’re always spending time with your friends — don’t you care about me?”

You could say: “I’m concerned that we don’t spend any time together anymore. I miss you.”

Instead of: “You make me so mad!”

You could say: “I’m frustrated that you won’t take the doctor’s advice. I want you to be healthy.”

Write down some “you” statements that you frequently make when talking to others.

Now, change these into “I” statements.

Next, keep track of situations or conflicts where you normally use a “you” statement to express yourself or ask for what you need. Instead, use an “I” statement, and then record the outcomes. Pay particular attention to how the other person responded.

Situation/ With whom?	What were your thoughts and feelings?	What “I” statement did you use?	What was the outcome? (How did the other person respond?)

Reflections on This Exercise

Did you find that your communication improved when you shifted from “you” statements to “I” statements? Give an example.

Did anyone notice that you were communicating in a different way? What did they say or do?

What can you do to remind yourself to use “I” statements instead of “you” statements?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?
