

I Messages

When you are in conflict, you may have difficulty clearly articulating your situation without escalating the conflict. Using an I Message (or “assertiveness statement”) can help you state your concerns, feelings, and needs in a manner that is easier for the listener to hear and understand.

The focus of an I Message is your own perspectives, and needs. It’s a way of saying “this is how things look from my perspective.” The focus is not on the other person or what you think the other person has done or failed to do.

The idea is to use the I Message to express your experience clearly, and in a way that does not attack, criticize, or blame others. Doing so reduces the likelihood of provoking defensiveness and hostility, or having the other person shut-down or tune you out. Ultimately, an I Message can help create more opportunities for the shared problem-solving by creating more opportunities for constructive dialogue about the true sources of conflict.

I Messages

- Are intended to open up healthy conversation.
- Are not intended to force another person to “fix the problem.”
- Help you communicate your perspectives and needs without blaming others, sounding threatening, or provoking defensiveness.
- Help you express your perspective and needs clearly.
- Help you get your point across without causing the listener to shut down.

I Message Example

1. **How you feel** “*I feel angry...*”
2. **What you have that feeling about** “*about the way you spoke to me...*”
3. **Why you feel this way** “*because it embarrassed me in front of my friends.*”
4. **What you need** “*I prefer that we discuss these kinds of concerns in private.*”

Examples of how to translate a heated remark into an “I” message

1. “You never listen to anyone, and you’re not really listening to me now”

“I feel that my concerns are not being heard. I need to know that you understand my concerns”

2. “I hate when you yell at the kids.”

When you yell at the kids, I feel angry because I need the kids to be treated with respect. I would prefer that you not raise your voice or curse in their presence.”

3. “It’s rude of you to be late all the time. You screw up everyone’s schedule.”

“When the office is scheduled to open at 8:30 but you don’t come in until 9am, I feel frustrated, because we can’t start our meetings on time. I need us to find a way for to work out the schedule so that the office is staffed by 8:30.”

4. “The salaries in this department are totally inequitable and discriminatory.”

“I am frustrated about the salary structure in this department. It seems that women are the lowest paid staff here. I would like to understand how salaries are calculated, and I would like an equity review be conducted to see if there are any patterns related to salary and gender.”