

I-STATEMENTS

Often when we have a problem, we think of it and state it as if the other person is causing our problem. We tend to send a lot of “you” messages as a result.

“You should _____.” “You are making me mad.” “Stop doing that.”

“You” messages have a good chance of making the other person feel put down or guilty and they convey the message that their feelings and needs are unimportant.

We need to think of our problems in terms of “I” – my problem, my reaction and my message. When we own the problem, we can be responsible for our own feelings.

“I” messages minimize defensive responses from others and allow the sender to say, “I trust you to decide what change in behavior is necessary.” An “I” message keeps communication open and helps to build relationships. “I” messages allow the sender an opportunity to state what she/he needs from the other person.

There are three parts to an “I” message:

1. Behavior – Specific words or actions that caused the problem for you.
2. Feelings – What you experienced as a result of the behavior.
3. Tangible Effect – Consequences the behavior had on you.

Examples:

1. Behavior – When you tap your pencil on the desk
 2. I feel upset because
 3. I get distracted and have difficulty concentrating.
-
1. Behavior - when I see the mess you left in the kitchen
 2. Feelings – I get mad because
 3. Tangible Effect – it takes me longer to get dinner ready.

Considerations about “I” messages for the sender.

- Take time to get in touch with your feelings.
- State your feelings without apologizing for them.
- Make clear that you object to the person’s behavior, not to the person.
- If possible, state the problem as soon as you have it.

“I” messages are helpful but they aren’t magic. Other people can be resistant to hearing your message. Patience with yourself and others is necessary.