

ESTIMATED TIME: 15 minutes

OUTCOME: To show how it is possible to face someone with whom you have a problem without either antagonizing them or withdrawing from the problem. To practice making non-judgmental statements and using a structure which can open rather than close discussion of a difficulty.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- A copy of the "I" Statements handout for each participant

ACTIVITY:

1. Introduce the idea of "I statements" to the participants, including examples of clear and clean "I" statements (Refer to "I" Statements Handout)
 - An "I" statement is a way of expressing clearly your point of view about a situation. It includes an expression of how it is affecting you, and how you would like to see it change;
 - The best "I" statement is free of specific demands and blame. It opens up the area for discussion and leaves the next move for the other person;
 - We should aim for our "I" statements to be clear (that is, to the point) and clean (that is, free of blame and judgment); and
 - We should beware of "you" statements which place blame on someone else, hold them responsible, demand change from them or hold a threat.
2. With the participants working in pairs, ask them to prepare one "I" statement each, relating to a current or recurring difficulty which they are facing in their lives. Partners can help each other to make their statements clear and clean.
3. Ask for a few examples from the participants, giving people an opportunity to comment on them and to offer suggestions as to how they might be improved.
4. Ask the participants to think of ways that the "I" statement formula could be useful in their lives.
5. Ask all participants to commit themselves to making one "I" statement to somebody in the next 24 hours.

“I” STATEMENTS HANDOUT

Two Examples of “You” Statements:

- You are so lazy, you never keep the house cleanly swept, you are always late with my food and the children are always crying. I don’t know why I married you. You must start to work harder from now on!
- You are always so drunk when you crash into the house at night. And you never give me any money to buy any food. I don’t know why I ever married you. You must stop going to that bar from now on!”

These statements are very judgmental and make the listener feel hemmed-in and thus defensive.

Two Examples of “I” Statements:

- When I come home I feel disappointed if the food is not ready and the house is not swept. I would like us to discuss how we can arrange things better so that this would be possible.
- When you come home at night after the bar, I feel disappointed, because I would like to see more of you, and I would like some money for food for the children. I would like us to discuss how we can arrange things better together.

These statements carry no blame and are phrased not to annoy the listener. The expectations within them are presented in a non-judgmental manner (there is no “you must...”) and are not accusing the listener. They state the speaker’s expectations or hopes, but they do not demand that they be met.

I Statement Formula

- The action: “When...” - make it as specific and nonjudgmental as possible, e.g. “when you come home at night”
- My response: “I feel...” – say “I feel...” rather than “I think...” and keep it to your own feelings: “I feel hurt/sad/happy/disappointed/ignored...” for instance. Not: “I feel that you are being mean!”
- Reason: “...because...” – if you think an explanation helps, you can add one here. But make sure it is still non-blaming, e.g. “...because I like to spend time with you.”
- Suggestions: “what I’d like is...” – a statement of the change you would like. It is ok to say what you want, but not to demand it of the other person, e.g. “what I’d like is for us to discuss this” Or “What I’d like is to make arrangements that we can both keep,” not “you must stop being so lazy!”

This is a structured format and may seem strange to start with. It takes time to absorb new skills and begin to use them unconsciously. Adapt the language to suit your situation.

- Try to use it first in an easy context, with a friend over a small problem. You can begin just by saying “I feel happy when...” and see how that works.
- Then as you gain practice in using it, you can try it with a friend in harder situations. You can start to try out “I feel unhappy when...”
- When you feel ok with that, you could try out “I feel happy when...” with your partner.
- Finally you can try out “I feel unhappy/sad/frustrated when...” with your partner. This sounds very daunting but, is possible to learn.