



“I” Messages or “I” Statements

This is taken from the ‘Office of the Boston University Ombuds, Francine Montemurro.

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

An “I-statement” focuses on your own feelings and experiences. It does not focus on your perspective of what the other person has done or failed to do. It is the difference, for example, between saying, “I feel that I am not being permitted to participate in office projects to the extent that others are” and “You always let Sarah work on office projects, but you never ask me if I’m interested.”

If you can express your experience in a way that does not attack, criticize, or blame others, you are less likely to provoke defensiveness and hostility which tends to escalate conflicts, or have the other person shut-down or tune you out which tends to stifle communication.

Ultimately, I-messages help create more opportunities for the resolution of conflict by creating more opportunities for constructive dialogue about the true sources of conflict.

What an “I” Message does

- An “I” message can help reduce blaming, accusations, and defensiveness.
- An “I” message can help you communicate your concerns, feelings, and needs without blaming others or sounding threatening. It helps you get your point across without causing the listener to shut down.
- An “I” message says “this is how it looks from my side of things.”

What an “I” Message doesn’t do

- An “I” message is not about being polite. It’s about being clear.
- An “I” messages is not concerned with how the other person might respond.
- An “I” message is not intended to force another person to “fix the problem.”
- It is clear statement that says, “this is how it looks from my perspective.”

- Even though “I” messages let you explain and how you would like things to be, it is free of expectations. If you expect the other person to respond as you want them to immediately, you probably have unrealistic expectations.
- An “I” Message is intended only to open up healthy conversation. Using it alone will not resolve the conflict. If you expect an “I” Message to fix the conflict, you probably have unrealistic expectations.

Four parts of an “I” Message:

1. “When you _____”
state observation
2. “I feel or I think _____”
state feeling
3. “Because _____”
state need
4. “I would prefer that _____”
state preference

Here’s another pattern to the “I” Message:

1. How you feel “I feel angry..”
2. What you have that feeling about “about the way he spoke to me..”
3. Why you feel this way “because it embarrassed me in front of my friends.”
4. What you would like to see instead: “I would prefer that we discuss these things 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”

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 mess up everyone’s schedule.”

“When you are scheduled to be at your desk at 8:30 but you don’t come in until 9:00, I feel disrespected/frustrated, and because your being late means we can’t start our meetings on time. I would prefer that you arrive to work at the agreed-upon time.”

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

“I feel angry by the salary structure in this department. I am among the lowest paid teachers here and that makes me feel terribly underappreciated. I would like to understand more about how salaries are calculated, and I would like to talk to you about whether raising my salary is possible in the next budget cycle.”