I Statements

Relationships: Saying How You Feel Without Blame

An I statement tells someone how their behavior affects you, without blaming or attacking them. Psychologist Thomas Gordon taught the idea to parents in his 1970 book Parent Effectiveness Training, and couples therapists still use it today. Starting with "I" instead of "you" tends to make people less defensive, so the conversation stays on the problem.

1 The formula

I feel (your feeling) **when** (what happened) **because** (why it matters to you). **I would like** (what you are asking for).

Instead of this	Try this
You never listen to me.	*I feel hurt when I get interrupted, because I want to be heard. I would like to finish my thought before you answer.*
You are always late.	*I feel stressed when we leave late, because I worry about missing the start. I would like us to leave by 6:30.*
You don't care about my job.	*I feel lonely when my work news doesn't come up, because it is a big part of my day. I would like us to share one thing from our days at dinner.*

Why does this work? *A "you" statement sounds like an accusation, and people defend themselves against accusations instead of listening. An I statement describes your own experience, which is hard to argue with, and makes a clear request the other person can act on.*

2 Tips for a good I statement

- Describe what happened, not the person. Say *"when the dishes are left in the sink,"* not *"when you are lazy."*
- Name a feeling, not a judgment. *"I feel lonely"* is a feeling. *"I feel like you don't care"* is a judgment.
- Keep the request small and specific, so the other person knows exactly what would help.
- Pick a calm moment. The same words land very differently in the middle of an argument.

Feeling words to try: hurt, worried, frustrated, lonely, embarrassed, overwhelmed, disappointed, scared, left out, anxious.

**This worksheet provides information but is not a substitute for therapy. It works best with guidance from a professional.*

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3 Write your own

Think of something that has been bothering you with someone in your life. Fill in each part.

I feel

when

because

I would like

Read it out loud. Is there any blame left in it? How might the other person hear it?

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