

Assertive Communication

"I" Messages

The focus of a message determines if it is assertive. When I talk about my thoughts and feelings I am being assertive. If my message tells you how you are feeling and thinking, I am being aggressive or non-assertive. Pronouns are the key.

An "I" message is:

A sentence beginning with "I".

A sentence which states a feeling (emotion).

Assertive	Aggressive
"I feel frightened when you drive this fast."	"You drive too fast."

It is useful because:

It doesn't put the other person down.

It is taking responsibility for your own behavior and feelings.

It is a more honest communication.

It is a way to keep yourself and the other person from becoming defensive.

Phony "I" Messages	Real "I" Messages
"I think you are so inconsiderate."	"I was disappointed when you ..."
"I was only trying to ..."	"I'm embarrassed about my effort to ...":
"I think you should ..."	"I would be relieved (delighted) if you would ..."
I can't understand why you ..."	"I feel confused about your ..."
"I wish you would listen."	"I'm hurt that you don't seem to listen."

"You" Messages

You messages are:

Communication focused away from the speaker onto the other person.

They blame, judge, label, provoke or accuse the other person.

You messages such as "you are", "you will", "you should", and "you must", are attempts to control the other person or situation by shifting the responsibility away from the speaker and onto the other.

"We" Messages

"We" messages diffuse the messages focus by making it to general.

When feelings are high, or you sense a battle coming, try an "I" message. Remember that you want to be responsible for yourself only, and to be as honest as you can about where you are.

Remember it does involve taking a risk, and the other person can always say "So what." But if you are looking for a solution to a problem rather than a fight, it is probably worth it to continue with additional "I" messages, said in a neutral tone of voice, until the other person's fears of being attacked have subsided. Negotiation toward a solution of the problem may then be possible.

Thinking and Feeling

A complete message contains both information about what the speaker thinks and what the speaker feels. When thinking and feeling are scrambled together or mislabeled the effect is confusing.

"I feel you've added these figures up all wrong." This leaves the listener confused. A more assertive communication in that situation might sound like this:

"I've found some mistakes in your addition, and I'm feeling worried about the accuracy of the reports you've done."

There are not always equal parts of thinking and feeling messages in a communication but it is important to start to make these important distinctions so you are accurately stating what is appropriate.

Some speakers are uncomfortable with direct expression of feelings. A speaker may say "I believe you're preoccupied with other thing," rather than risk an assertive and direct disclosure of feelings such as "I feel neglected and ignored, and taken for granted."

One common way in which people confuse and mix up thinking and feeling content is using the phrase "I believe...". "I believe" says nothing about the speaker because the thinking and feeling content are not separated and identified.

Feeling	Thinking
Pleasure	Plans
Fear	Considerations
Anger	Reflections
Love	Opinions
Boredom	Thoughts
Anxiety	Ideas
Pain	Concepts

Practice

For some practice, choose several situations that you are presently involved in to fill in the banks.

I feel _____ when _____
and I would like _____.

I feel _____ when _____
and I would like _____.

I feel _____ when _____
and I would like _____.