

Student Handout B

“I” Messages

“I” messages let you say what you think and how you feel without putting down or attacking the other person. When you are hurt, upset, or angry, an “I” message can help you talk things through without getting into an escalating confrontation.

Here is an example of the difference between a “you” message and an “I” message:

“You” message: “You selfish jerk! You think the TV belongs to you. Well, it’s my turn now.”

“I” message: “I feel annoyed when you switch the channel without asking. I want to be able to watch my show all the way through.”

An “I” message has three basic parts:

- “I feel...”
Tell how you feel. Follow “I feel...” with a feeling word: “I feel disappointed...”
- “...when...”
Tell what the other person did or said that caused you to feel that way. “I feel disappointed when you cancel our plans at the last minute.”
- “I want...”
Tell what you want to happen: “I feel disappointed when you cancel our plans at the last minute. I want you to let me know earlier if you can’t make it.”

“I” messages can include a fourth part telling why you feel as you do about what happened—a “because” section: “I feel disappointed when you cancel our plans at the last minute, because then I’m left on my own and it’s too late to plan something else. I want you to let me know earlier if you can’t make it.”

Caution: It’s easy to add blame or name-calling to the “because” statement; e.g., “I feel disappointed when you cancel our plans at the last minute, because that’s a really rotten thing to do.” This is not a true “I” message.