

HEART: Relationships

Handout #1: "I" Statements

An **"I" statement** is a communication method that focuses on the speaker's own feelings, needs, and experiences rather than the actions or character of the listener. By starting sentences with "I" instead of "you," you take personal responsibility for your emotions and avoid making the other person feel attacked, blamed, or criticized.

"I" Statements:

- **Reduce Defensiveness:** "You" statements (e.g., "You always...") often trigger a defensive reaction or counter-attack. "I" statements invite the other person into a dialogue rather than a conflict.
- **Increase Empathy:** Sharing your internal state helps others understand the emotional impact of their actions, which can spark compassion and a desire to help.
- **Foster Problem-Solving:** Instead of arguing over who is at fault, "I" statements frame the issue as a shared problem to be worked together.

A Simple Formula - fill in the [blanks]

"I feel [emotion] when [specific behavior or situation]." You can also include "because [reason]" and/or what you would like to see instead "[idea/preference]."

Scenario	Instead of a "You" Statement...	Try an "I" Statement
Household Chores	"You never help with the dishes; you're so lazy."	"I feel [overwhelmed] when [the kitchen is messy after a long day]. I'd appreciate [some help with the cleaning]."
Unreliable Plans	"You're always late—don't you care about my time?"	"I feel [frustrated] when [plans change at the last minute] because [I like to have a clear schedule]."
Feeling Unheard	"You never listen to me!"	"I feel [unheard and discouraged] when [I'm interrupted while sharing something important]."
Physical Space	"You're always ignoring my boundaries."	"I feel [anxious] when [I don't have time to myself]. I need [an hour to recharge in the evenings]."

Tips for Success

- **Identify the Feeling First:** Pause to figure out what you're actually feeling before you speak.
- **Be Specific:** Avoid generalities like "all the time" or "always." Focus on one specific event.
- **Avoid "Disguised" You-Statements:** Phrases like "I feel *that* you are being mean" or "I feel you are *always* correcting me." are just accusations in disguise. They are generally thoughts or judgments and not true emotions. Stick to your own internal feelings, such as "I feel hurt" or "I feel embarrassed."