

Better Communications "I" Statements

One of the common barriers to good communication can be the use of statements that seem to accuse or condemn. This activity will help you to make you aware of these condemning "You" statements and will show you a way to change them.

Directions: Read this page together; then, complete your worksheets individually, but help each other if you get stuck. When you are both finished, discuss the summary statement.

The following statements, and any similar ones, are almost guaranteed to be met by an angry or defensive response. They are communication stoppers. They are "You" statements. Used when expressing negative feelings, "You" statements express blaming, preaching, name-calling, demands, and put downs. The receiver of "You" statements is rarely open to continuing this sort of communication with good feelings.

You are the messiest person I've ever seen.
You are a selfish, spoiled brat.
You never get anywhere on time!
You whine like a little baby.
Can't you ever put your things away when you're finished with them?

Open dialogue is halted because the listener is bound to defend or deny the charges. The listener may also withdraw in fear or lash out in anger. In short, "You" statements aren't very likely to be "heard" as an effective means of expressing displeasure with another person's behavior. "I" statements do the job much better!

I can't work in the kitchen when it's a mess.
I feel hurt and angry when you don't show appreciation for the things I've done for you.
I get worried when you don't show up on time.
I don't like it when you use that tone of voice.
I sure get discouraged when you don't put your things away.

"I" statements are specific about undesirable or offensive behavior whereas "You" statements are often vague, generalized and unspecific.

"Why don't you ever pick up you clothes?" is much more likely to get an angry or defensive response to them, "I get really uptight when you leave your clothes lying around. Would you please pick them up?" In the latter statement, the listener hears that the speaker is feeling upset, is having a problem with the listener's behavior and is requesting help with that problem. The listener may then be more willing to alter their behavior out of respect or caring, or just a willingness to cooperate.

Summary:

By using "I" statements the speaker takes the responsibility for his/her feelings and creates a better atmosphere for open, honest dialogue. "You" statements create an atmosphere for hostile, angry and defensive exchanges. "I" statements help build cooperation, openness and respect in a relationship.