

## “I” Messages

**I messages may be the best known, most effective communication tool ever invented. It is a fantastic tool for improving communication, resolving conflict and establishing healthy boundaries. The three-step process is easy to misuse. It’s SIMPLE, but definitely NOT EASY!**

### Three Steps:

- 1 Report your concrete observation (neutral words, body language & voice tone) “It seems \_\_\_\_\_”
- 2 Describe the emotions you feel when this happens (genuine feelings) “I feel \_\_\_\_\_”
- 3 Make a request (something they are able to do at this time) “In the future would it be possible \_\_\_\_\_?”

### Do’s:

- Report your observations concretely and without judgment using emotionally neutral language.
- Use externalizing language to name the issue so as not to imply the other person is the problem!
- Share your genuine feelings (emotions) without over or understating them.
- Assume the other person cares about how you feel (unless they are a socio-path, they probably do).
- Completely avoid the use of the judgmental feeling word “YOU”
- Make a specific request that is concrete, realistic, time-bound and attainable by the other person.
- Be sure the specific request is a question, not an order, mandate or ultimatum.
- Be open to discussion and modification if the other person does not feel they are able to comply.

### Don’ts:

- Exaggerate, use sarcasm, irony, innuendo, name-calling, and threats or blame language.
- Use a blaming tone or body language.
- Exaggerate or diminish (water down) your emotions.
- Substitute an evaluation for an expression of emotion (Avoid “I feel that...” or “I feel like...”).
- Turn “I statements” into “You statements” (“I feel that YOU...”).
- Use the word “YOU” at all.
- Forget to make a specific request.
- Make unreasonable, unclear or vague requests.

### Putting the tool to work

- At first using this tool will feel unnatural or fake. Again, this tool is simple, but NOT EASY!
- Memorize the three steps (so you can use without much effort) until you get the hang of it.
- Write out “BIG STUFF” 3-step messages and practice before the emotionally charged moment.
- Role-play the “BIG STUFF” 3-step messages with an “I messages” expert for maximum impact.
- In some instances “I messages” are best written (so recipient has time / space to process).
- Over-use of any tool can reduce effectiveness (consider how often is too often with each person).
- Practice with people who you don’t find difficult and on “small stuff”.