

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# Family Communication

## Building Understanding

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**Session Length:** 2 hours

### Objectives

Participants will:

- Understand the impact of nonverbal communication
- Identify utility of I-statements vs. you-statements
- Explore techniques for sending clear messages
- Practice skills through role play and discussion

### Synopsis

Continuing with the theme of family communication, this session introduces parents to speaking skills that help increase cooperation and understanding. The importance of nonverbal signals, especially in family communication, is emphasized and participants are introduced to “I-Messages” (Gordon, 1973) as a strategy for expressing parental feelings and requests to children in a nonjudgmental way. Techniques for sending clear messages to children are demonstrated and participants are encouraged to rehearse skills and explore applications with their children.

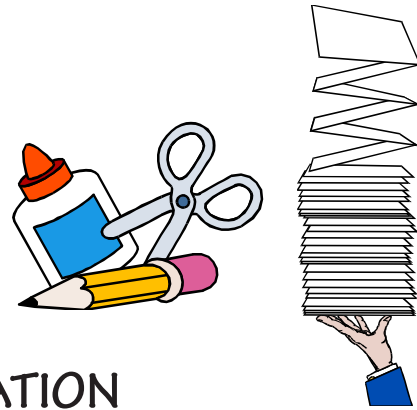
### Session Outline



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Procedure	Time
Welcome/Session overview	10 minutes
Homework review	15 minutes
Speaking without words	20 minutes
The “I-Message”	20 minutes
Clear, kind, and firm	15 minutes
Practice and discussion	30 minutes
Concluding discussion	05 minutes
Homework	05 minutes
<b>Total Time for Session 4</b>	<b>120 minutes</b>

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## MATERIALS AND PREPARATION

- ▶ **Here's what you will need to have ready for the group:**
  - **SELF-STUDY** – The Appendix (pp. 197–) contains short articles on child development and parenting issues for additional reading. Likewise, the Resources (pp. 187–190) and References (p. 191) sections can direct you to other materials for self-study.
  - **COPIES OF MATERIALS** – Make copies of the following hand-outs, located at the end of the session:
    - *Maximizing Communication* (pp. 92–93)
    - *100 Real Feelings* (p. 94)
    - *I-Messages vs. You-Messages* (p. 95)
    - *I-Message Practice* (p. 96)
    - *Sending I-Messages* (pp. 97–98)
    - *Sample Scenarios* (p. 99)
    - *Session Four Evaluation* (p. 100)
  - **SUPPORT MATERIALS** – Equip meeting room with a flipchart and easel, eraser board, or chalkboard. If you are using a flipchart, have masking tape or push pins available to hang completed pages for easy reference. Have extra pens, pencils, and paper available in case participants need them.

# PROCEDURE



10 Minutes

## WELCOME / SESSION OVERVIEW

- 1 **Welcome participants as they arrive.**
  
- 2 **Introduce the session topic.**
  - In today's session we will continue to explore communication strategies that can help improve family relationships.
  - Last week, we explored a skill called active listening that parents can use as a door opener to encourage children to talk about their feelings and problems. Today, we'll delve into speaking skills that help answer that age-old parental plea "How can I talk so that my kids will listen to me?"
  - Unfortunately, there's no magic formula that can guarantee that children will listen to or comply with everything a parent says or requests. However, there are several time-tested techniques that do increase the odds that kids will listen and cooperate. As an extra bonus, these techniques work well with adults, too.
  - Let's go over the homework activity before moving on.



15 Minutes

## HOMEWORK REVIEW

- 3 **Review homework assignment. Encourage a brief discussion using some the following questions:**
  - The homework assignment was to practice active listening skills daily during the past week. You also were asked to avoid using the "roadblocks" we identified. Let's hear about what happened with active listening first.
  - ❓ *Describe an active listening attempt that was the most successful for you (even if it wasn't "perfect"). Give some quick background and share what happened.*

- ? *How did you make yourself stay focused on active listening?*
- ? *How did your child react? Was it different from what you would have predicted? In what way?*
- ? *How about the active listening attempt that turned out to be the least successful? What happened?*
- ? *In retrospect, how would you have handled it differently?*
- ? *Tell me about a situation last week when you were about to use a “roadblock” but caught yourself. What was the situation and which roadblock did you avoid?*
- ? *What did you do instead?*
- ? *What helped you catch yourself in time?*

- 4** Thank participants for their willingness to give the assignment a try. Reiterate the importance of active listening and avoiding roadblocks, especially the more negative roadblocks (e.g., blaming, humiliating, making fun, criticizing). These skills take time, patience, and practice to master. The first step is simple awareness.



20 Minutes

## **SPEAKING WITHOUT WORDS**

- 5** Lead into a discussion on the importance of nonverbal communication with some of the following points:

- As we shift our focus slightly from listening to talking, keep in mind that much of the meaning we send when we speak is carried not in our words, but in how we say those words.
- Similarly, much of the understanding we get when others communicate with us comes from how they say what they say.
- It’s called nonverbal communication, or “body language.”
- What we do with our bodies, our tone voice, our faces, our eyes, our hands, and our gestures says much more than words alone.
- Our feelings and attitudes are usually very obvious in our body language. The body language we use will often influence how people react or respond to us.

- In just a bit we'll talk about some of the body language issues parents need to keep in mind when communicating with their children.
- First, though, let's try a fun activity that will help increase our awareness of how nonverbal communication impacts us all.

## 6 Use one of the following exercises to help participants explore the dimensions of nonverbal communication:

### ◆ Wearing Your Feelings

- ➔ Prepare headbands or small signs for each person in the group to wear (use one or the other). Each headband or sign should have written on it a feeling, mood, or attitude.
- ➔ Put a headband or sign on each group member. The person wearing the headband or sign should not be able to see what is written on it. Headbands should display the feeling word facing outward. If you use signs, they should be affixed to each person's back. In this way, group members can see and read each other's signs, but not their own.
- ➔ Instruct them not to tell each other what is on their signs or headbands.
- ➔ Ask them to pretend they are at a gathering, like a party, where they are meeting new people.
- ➔ Instruct them to mill around together and to react non verbally to each person based on the mood or feeling that person is "showing" on their headband or sign.
- ➔ Instruct them to react "as if" the other person really was displaying the mood or attitude he/she wears, but not to spill the beans! They are not to tell others what's on their headbands and not to ask about their own.
- ➔ Allow about 5 – 10 minutes for the role play.
- ➔ Discuss the activity:
  - ? *What do you think is written on your sign?*
  - ? *How do you know?*
  - ? *How did you figure out what was on your sign?*

- ? *What about the nonverbal reactions you gave to others? What did you find interesting about their reaction to your reaction?*
- ? *Were some moods and feelings easier to react to than others? Which ones? How did you react?*
- ? *What did this exercise teach you about nonverbal communication?*

### ◆ Statues

- Have participants choose a partner.
- Distribute to each pair a card with a mood, feeling, or attitude written on it (e.g., angry, afraid, ashamed, in love, depressed, broken hearted, confident, etc.).
- Tell pairs to keep their cards to themselves.
- Give each pair a turn in front of the group. One person will be the “statue”, and the other person will arrange his legs, hands, posture, and face to act out the feeling on their card. Instruct them not to talk or use words while completing their arrangements
- After each pair completes this arrangement process, the rest of the group guesses what feeling is being portrayed. Instruct the group not to start throwing out guesses until each team has completed its “statue.”
- Discuss the exercise:
  - ? *How did you and your partner decide who would be the statue and who the “sculptor?”*
  - ? *For the feeling on your card, how did you decide on which gestures, postures, and facial expressions would be best to use in your arrangement?*
  - ? *For those who served as statues, what difference did it make that you already knew the feeling on the card? How would it have been different had your partner been trying to “arrange” you when you didn’t know the feeling?*
  - ? *When you were trying to figure out the other teams’ feelings, what were some “cinches” or “dead give-a-ways” that alerted you to the answer?*

? *What has the exercise helped you learn about body language?*

**7** Thank participants for their willingness to take part in the exercise. Encourage them to try it with their children. Most kids will find this kind of activity fun, and doing it with them provides parents with a teaching opportunity for helping children better understand nonverbal communication, too.



Handout,  
pp. 92-93  
Handout,  
p. 94

**8** Distribute *Maximizing Communication and 100 Real Feelings* handouts and summarize the discussion on nonverbal communication using some of the following points:

- When we pay attention to what we are “saying” nonverbally we maximize our communication effectiveness. This is often easier said than done because most of the time we are not very aware of our body language.
- Children, however, are very aware of their parents’ body language. When your tone of voice, eyes, or face are conveying strong emotions, children may not be able to pay attention to your words or understand what you are trying to say.
- Becoming aware of the powerful impact body language has on how others interpret what we say is the first step.
- Once we are aware of our body language, we can make changes and do things differently in order to increase our effectiveness.

**9** Model how each of the following nonverbal dimensions can be used to enhance parent-child communication (e.g., appropriate tone of voice; getting on the child’s eye level). Also model examples of body language that may inhibit communication (e.g., angry gestures; looming over a small child).

- Here are some key types of body language to keep in mind when talking with your child.
  - **Body Posture:** Whenever possible, make sure you are at your child’s eye level when you talk to him. Avoid “looming” over your child when you speak. This is especially important when you



want to redirect a toddler's activity, or when you need to set limits or explain consequences to a preschooler. It may be hard on your knees, but getting down to your child's eye level helps him feel respected as a human being and makes it easier for him to really "hear" you.

- **Eye Contact:** Look at your child when you speak to him using natural, comfortable eye contact. Avoid glaring or trying to stare your child down.
- **Facial Expression:** Make sure your face matches your words. Nothing is more confusing for a child than trying to figure out what the real story is when a parent's facial expression contradicts what he or she is saying. For example, smiling when you tell your child that you are angry, or frowning when you're telling the child how much you appreciate something.
- **Gestures:** Natural gestures add emphasis to a message and help clarify its meaning. Avoid using hostile or aggressive gestures with your children. Examples include finger-wagging, pounding the table, or shaking a finger or fist in your child's face.
- **Voice:** A firm, well-modulated voice reflects a calm and confident emotional state. Shrillness, screaming, or yelling reflect anger and lack of control. A soft, wavering voice reflects indecision or lack of confidence. Avoid speaking with a sarcastic, bitter, or mocking tone of voice (your child will almost surely begin mimicking you and it'll drive you nuts). As much as possible, use a calm, level voice when talking with your children.
- **Touch:** How we touch our children sends a strong, nonverbal message. Grabbing, shoving, slapping, or poking a child will almost always send a negative message. Touching children as part of communication should be neutral or gentle, never rough. For example, holding your child's shoulder while you calmly direct him to a "time out" room communicates firm, but gentle authority. Pushing or shoving him into the "time out" room communicates anger and disrespect, not authority.
- **Personal Space:** Respect the child's need to control his "personal space" whenever possible. All of us, children and adults alike, develop a preference for how close we like to be

when we interact with other people. If your child doesn't want to be tickled, hugged, or kissed by Aunt Betty, respect that choice. Don't force your child to get closer to someone than she is comfortable with.

## 10 Discuss ideas for improving and staying aware of nonverbal communication using some of the following questions:

- ? *Why is nonverbal communication so powerful?*
- ? *What do you remember about how your parents communicated nonverbally with you?*
- ? *When you get on your child's level and have eye contact, what are you communicating to your child? How might your child feel?*
- ? *If you talk in a shrill tone and shake a finger at your child, what are you communicating? How might your child feel?*
- ? *How might you apply good nonverbal communication skills in your adult relationships? What benefits might there be?*



20 Minutes

## THE "I-MESSAGE"

### 11 Briefly define I-Messages and review the rationale for using them more frequently in parent-child communication. Include some of the following points:

- Along with active listening, I-Messages round out a basic system for effective communication.
- Parents are encouraged to use I-Messages to express their feelings and concerns to their children, and to describe problems. I-Messages are also good for modeling a constructive way to handle anger or deal with unpleasant situations.
- I-Messages may be neutral, preventive, or confrontive, depending on what the parent needs to express.
- Neutral I-Messages are used in the course of normal, no-conflict interactions to express ideas, opinions, or feelings. For example,

‘I don’t want french toast for breakfast,’ ‘I feel relaxed now that I’ve had a nap,’ or ‘I like the way our new chair looks in the living room.’

- Parents can use preventive or confrontive I-Messages when they experience feelings of annoyance, frustration, resentment, tension, discomfort, or anxiety over the behavior of the child. For example, the child is kicking the back of the chair, the child is interrupting you on the phone, the child has left his toys all over the stairs, or the child is running through the house screaming.
- The first step is to get a feel for the difference between I-Messages and You-Messages.



Handout,  
p. 95

## 12 **Distribute *I-Messages Vs You-Messages* handout, and walk participants through the key differences between the two communication strategies. Include some of the following points:**

- You’ve probably already gotten an idea about the difference between an I-Message and a You-Message from last week’s handout on communication roadblocks.
- You-Messages tend to produce communication roadblocks and I-Messages tend to open the door to better communication. Remember, how we say what we say is sometimes more important than what we say.
- Let’s go over a few examples:

## 13 **Review examples from handout and help participants explore the differences.**

- ? *What’s different about these two ways of communicating?*
- ? *What roadblocks do you see represented in the You-Messages?*
- ? *In one example, the You-Message is “You’re stupid. You never do anything right.” How would you feel if someone said that to you? How do you think hearing that might make a child feel?*

## 14 **Summarize the differences between the two communication styles using some of the following points:**

- The main advantage the I-Message has over the You-Message is that I-Message is much more honest. (It's kinder, too.)
- When we use I-Messages we give our children an honest reading of our feelings and we help them learn how their behavior impacts us and others.
- I-Messages help open communication and involve the parent in solving the issue with the child. You-Messages can be seen as pushing the child away.
- The I-Message is much less likely to cause resistance, and is much less likely to harm the child's self esteem. When you learn to use I-Messages correctly, you help protect your child from feeling blamed, rejected, "bad," or beyond redemption.
- To communicate honestly to the child the effect his behavior has on you is much less threatening and hurtful than suggesting that something is bad or wrong with the child because of the behavior. In other words, telling your child how you feel is far less threatening than accusing him of causing your bad feelings.
- Let's take a few minutes to practice what we've discussed so far. After that, I'll show you a "formula" for putting I-Messages to work. We'll spend the rest of the session practicing and talking about how to make it work with your kids.



Worksheet,  
p. 96

## 15 **Distribute *I-Message Practice* worksheets and allow time for participants to complete this practice exercise.**

- Don't make the exercise more complicated than it needs to be.
- The purpose is to help you get a sense of the difference between "I" and "You" Messages.
- It's okay for your sentences to be short and simple. Relax, and have fun with it. Don't try to say too much. Just concentrate on getting the spirit of using I-Messages.

## 16 **When participants have completed the exercise, review it by having volunteers share their I-Message response. Provide clarification as needed and encourage questions.**



15 Minutes

Handout,  
pp. 97-98

## CLEAR, KIND, AND FIRM

**17** Distribute *Sending I-Messages* handout. Review suggestions for communicating clearly with children. Model examples of how these techniques may be used. Include some of the following points:

- I-Messages are not magical sentences that will instantly influence children to straighten out and fly right. Rather, they are part of an interaction sequence that usually begins when the child's behavior is a problem for the parent, others, or the child himself.
- The most common format for using I-Messages is:
  - **I feel ...**
  - **when ...**
  - **because ...**
  - **request ...**
- The "I feel" part expresses your feelings about the child's behavior, the "when" part is a specific, nonblaming description of the child's behavior, and the "because" part explains the effects the child's behavior is having on you. For example, "I get frustrated (feeling) when you track mud on the floor (the behavior) because I spent the last hour cleaning it." (explains why the behavior bothers you).
- In some cases, this type of I-Message is enough to stop the behavior or elicit a positive response from the child, such as cleaning up the mud in the example just given.
- In other cases, the parent may want to add a command or request to the child to stop the behavior. For example, "When you play on the stairs (the behavior) I worry (the feelings) that you'll fall and get hurt (the reason). I'd like for you to move away from the stairs to play (request for the child to stop the behavior)."
- Of course, even the most carefully thought out I-Message delivered perfectly will fail to move some children some of the time. This doesn't mean the technique is flawed. It just means that parents must use additional skills in order to help children behave.

■ The **broken record** technique is often effective when children ignore a request for behavior change. It gets its name because it involves repeating the same request over and over. Here are some guidelines:

- When you plan your I-Message, determine what you want your child to do (e.g., “I want you to play away from the stairs”).
- Keep requests simple, especially for younger children. State one request at a time, rather than giving the child a string of commands.
- Calmly repeat what you want the child to do if he argues with you or ignores you (e.g., “Billy, I want you to play away from the stairs”).
- Do not respond directly to any argument or resistance from the child. For example:

**Billy:** “Aw, Mom. I’m being careful. I want to play here.” (argument)

**Mom:** “Billy, I want you to play away from the stairs.” (broken record)

- Use a broken record a maximum of three times. If your child does not obey, be prepared to set consequences and then follow-through (e.g., “Billy, you have a choice. You can move away from the stairs right now or go to your room for 10 minutes”).
- Along with I-Messages and the broken record, parents can also use their body language as a powerful tool for effective communication. To maximize these techniques, remember these points:
- Stay calm. Don’t scream or yell your I-Messages, requests, or broken records at your child. Speak in a firm, calm tone of voice. When you are calm, you communicate to your child that you are in control. Use gestures only to emphasize your words, not to intimidate your child.
  - Look your child in the eye when you speak. Eye contact helps you communicate to your child that you are serious about your request and want her to take it seriously, too. You can increase the effectiveness of what you say with eye contact. If your child won’t look at you, gently turn her head to look in her eyes.

- Touch your child. Gently placing your hand on your child's shoulder and getting on eye level with him helps him focus on your message and tells him nonverbally that you expect him to pay attention.
- Lastly, don't drop the ball on active listening. Active listening and I-Messages can work hand-in-hand, and a parent may have to switch back and forth between them when working with a child to change or alter behavior. For example:

**Parent:** *I don't like it when you turn the TV volume up so loud because it hurts my ears. Please turn the volume down. (I-Message)*

**Janie:** *You never make Billy turn it down.*

**Parent:** *You think I'm being unfair about the TV volume rules. (active listening)*

**Janie:** *Yeah. Billy always has the TV on loud.*

**Parent:** *You're wondering why I haven't said something to Billy. (active listening)*

**Janie:** *Yeah, it's not fair.*

**Parent:** *Well, you may be right. I'll have to think about it. But for now, I don't like the TV being so loud. Please turn the volume down. (active listening and broken record).*

## 18 Encourage questions and discuss how these techniques may be used with different age children.



30 Minutes

### PRACTICE AND DISCUSSION

## 19 Introduce the practice session by reviewing guidelines for role-play and giving constructive feedback.

- One benefit of this group is that we can practice skills and “experiment” with each other to get a feel for new techniques.
- The purpose of role-play is to help each other learn and “get the hang” of skills that may feel awkward or even silly at first. We'll work at a pace that is comfortable for everyone.

- We'll use “real life” situations. This will give everyone a chance to apply new skills to recurring parenting problems and get some feedback.
- After each person practices, the rest of us will provide feedback on what we observed and offer suggestions, when appropriate, about how effectiveness might be improved.
- As group leader(s), my job will be to provide you with several role-played examples of how a skill is used and what it looks and sounds like.



Handout,  
p. 99

**20** Lead participants in a role playing session to practice using I-Messages and related skills. A page of sample role play scenarios is provided. However, participants may prefer to volunteer real life situations for practice.

**21** Help parents experiment with using both active listening as well as broken record techniques when I-Message requests are met with resistance. It's helpful to play out a scenario using one technique and then follow with the same scenario using a different technique. This will help parents weigh their strategy choices for dealing with their children's arguments or noncompliance.

**22** Discuss the practice session using some of the following questions:

- ? *How did it feel to practice using I-Messages?*
- ? *What benefits do you see in using I-Messages more often?*
- ? *In what types of situations do you think I-Messages will be most helpful?*
- ? *What's going to be the most challenging thing for you in using I-Messages?*
- ? *How might you apply some of these skills in your adult relationships? What benefits might there be?*



**23** Thank participants for their work. Reassure them that many parents find using I-Messages to be awkward in the beginning, but with practice it becomes easier.



5 Minutes

## CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

**24** Provide wrap-up and closure for the session. Highlight the following points:

- There are a couple of important points to keep in mind about I-Messages, active listening, broken record, and the other communication issues we've discussed.
- For many parents, these skills "feel" like a foreign language. The good news is that if you begin using these skills consistently (and early with young children), there's a good chance they'll become the "native" language for your child. Remember, when you use these skills to improve your parenting, you are also modeling them for your child. An effective communication style will help your child throughout life.
- These skills enable parents to put into action some of the values they may hold and want to instill in their child (e.g., respect for others, honesty, kindness, consideration, and problem-solving).
- The steepest mountain is often the hardest to climb. Odds are, if you can master using these skills with your children, you'll be able to use them with just about anybody.
- Listening, avoiding roadblocks, and using I-Messages to head off problem behavior has the added benefit of helping you feel good about yourself. All of us get a self-esteem boost when we are able to help others by listening or when we are able to resolve a problem calmly without blaming or name-calling.



5 Minutes

## HOMEWORK

**25** Give the following homework suggestions:

- Between now and the next time we meet, practice using I-Messages, body language skills, active listening, and broken records. Make it a

point to use three (3) I-Messages each day. Pay attention to how you feel and how your child responds when you use these techniques.

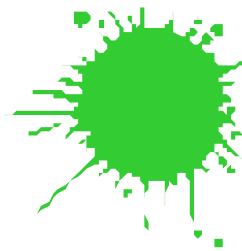
- If you “catch” yourself using a You-Message, stop immediately and correct it. For example: “Johnny, how many times have I told you not to leave your toys on the floor!!!! Whoa – let me back up on this one.” Then calmly, but firmly: “Johnny, I really get upset when you leave your toys all over the floor because I’m afraid I’ll trip over them. I want you to put them away right now.”
- Your children or partner may look at you like you’ve flipped out when you practice these “self-corrections”. Just tell them proudly that you are trying to learn to express yourself better. You’ll also model for your children that perfection isn’t required, and that even parents have to work hard sometimes to make changes.
- As with last week, keep on thinking about roadblocks and making purposeful efforts to avoid using them. Keep on devising your own strategies and successes for avoiding roadblocks. Pay attention to how you feel when you’re successful.

**26** Thank group members for coming and for their participation. Invite them to return to the next session.



Session  
Evaluation,  
p. 100

**27** Ask participants to complete a *Session Evaluation* form before leaving.



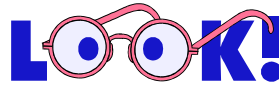
## MAXIMIZING COMMUNICATION



### Posture

Don't stand over the child - get on the child's eye level.

### Eye Contact

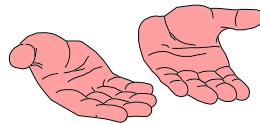


Look at your child when speaking to him/her. Use natural, comfortable eye contact. Avoid glaring or hard stares.



### Facial Expression

Your face should match your words. Explain what you are feeling, don't expect your child to guess based on your facial expression.



### Gestures

Use natural gestures to add meaning. Avoid hostile or aggressive gestures such as finger-wagging or pounding a fist.

### Voice

Use a level, calm tone.



Avoid shrillness, sarcasm, and mocking. If you whine, your child may learn to whine, too



## Touch

Touch should be neutral or gentle, never rough. Avoid grabbing, shoving, slapping, or poking. Use touch to communicate gentle authority.



## Personal Space

Respect the child's need for physical distance. Don't force your child to be hugged, kissed, or tickled if he/she doesn't want to.

## Notes

I plan to make the following changes in how I communicate non-verbally with my child:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

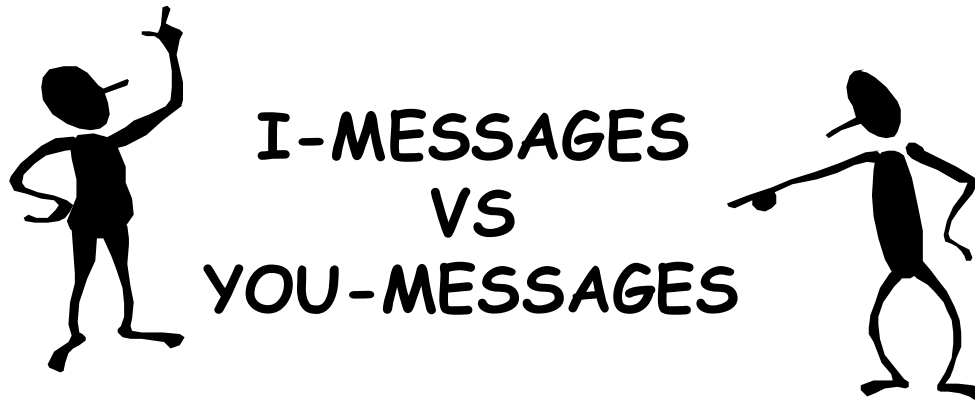
2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

# 100 REAL FEELINGS

affectionate	fatalistic	misunderstood
afraid	fearful	needy
alone	feminine	old
angry	flirty	optimistic
anxious	frustrated	out-of-control
attractive	generous	oversexed
awkward	genuine	paranoid
beaten	gentle	passionate
beautiful	glad	peaceful
brave	grateful	persecuted
calm	guilty	phony
caring	happy	playful
comfortable	hateful	pleased
committed	hopeful	possessive
concerned	hopeless	preoccupied
confident	hostile	pressured
confused	hurt	proud
content	ignored	quiet
cruel	impatient	rejected
curious	inadequate	repulsed
defeated	incompetent	restrained
defensive	inferior	sad
depressed	insecure	secure
deprived	isolated	seductive
desperate	jealous	self-pitying
different	joyful	self-reliant
disappointed	judgmental	sexy
eager	lively	shallow
easygoing	lonely	shy
embarrassed	lovable	silly
envious	loved	sincere
evil	loving	sinful
excited	masculine	sorry





I-Messages open up communication.  
You-Messages create roadblocks.

I-Messages are honest and kind.  
You-Messages are harsh and hurtful.

I-Messages protect self-esteem.  
You-Messages hurt self-esteem.

I-Messages focus on feelings and behavior.  
You-Messages focus on fault and blame.

### Examples:

I want you to stop running in the house.

Vs

You know you're not supposed to run in the house.

I would like for you to help your sister.

Vs

You're suppose to help your sister.

I don't like all this noise. Please turn the volume down.

Vs

You're giving me a headache. Turn that thing down.

I'm angry about this mess. Please clean it up.

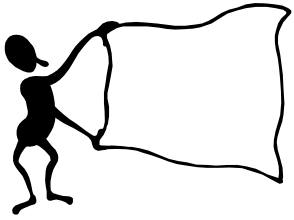
Vs

You make me so mad!! Now look what you've done!

I'd like for you to tell me what's upset you so much.

Vs

You're acting like a baby.



## I-Message Practice

For each of the following situations, write a "You-Message" response, then an "I-Message" response. Write only one sentence for each, and keep it simple.

**Your child has just tracked in some mud on your clean floor.**

You-Message \_\_\_\_\_

I-Message \_\_\_\_\_

**Your child keeps interrupting you while you're on the phone.**

You-Message \_\_\_\_\_

I-Message \_\_\_\_\_

**Your child is ignoring your request to turn off the TV.**

You-Message \_\_\_\_\_

I-Message \_\_\_\_\_

**Your child forgot to do one of his assigned chores.**

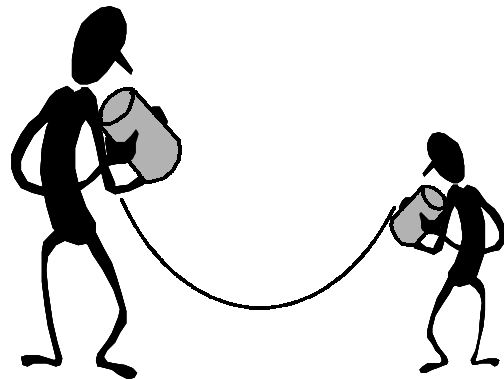
You-Message \_\_\_\_\_

I-Message \_\_\_\_\_

# Sending I-Messages

## I-Message formula:

- *I feel ...*
- *When ...*
- *Because ...*
- *Request for change ...*



- ✓ The “**I feel**” part allows you to express your feelings honestly and respectfully.
- ✓ The “**when**” part allows you to tell your child in a non-blaming way about the problem behavior.
- ✓ The “**because**” part allows you to explain why the behavior is a problem.
- ✓ The “**request**” part allows you to add a command or request that the behavior be stopped or changed.

### Example

“When you play on the stairs (behavior), I worry (feelings) that you’ll fall and get hurt (reason). I want you to play in the living room instead (request).”



I-messages are not magic. They won’t guarantee that a child will behave. However, using I-Messages helps parents communicate clearly and honestly in a way that a child can understand.

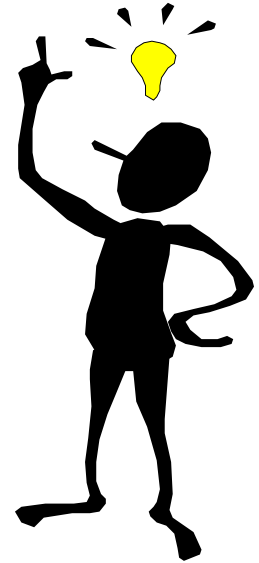


## Tips for using I-Messages

★ **Stay Calm.** Deliver your I-Message in a firm, calm tone. Calmness and a level tone communicate to your child that you are in control. Screaming or yelling communicates that you have lost control.

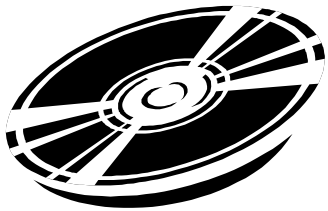
★ **Look your child in the eye.** Eye contact communicates to your child that you are serious about your request. Don't glare or frown.

★ **Touch your child.** A gentle hand on the shoulder and getting on eye level will help your child pay attention.



## Broken record technique

- ★ Use when child ignores or argues.
- ★ Do not respond directly to the argument or resistance.
- ★ Calmly repeat your request or command for behavior change.
- ★ Repeat request no more than 3 times.
- ★ If child fails to obey, state the consequences and follow-through.



### Example

"Billy, you have a choice. You can move your game off the staircase right now or you can go to your room for a 10 minute time out."

## Sample Scenarios for role play or case study

Apply I-Messages and related communication techniques to these scenarios. Use role play to practice what you might say and how you would say it.

You asked your child to clean his room an hour ago. As you walk by his room, you notice that he's been playing with his toys rather than cleaning.



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You discover your child playing with her finger-paints on the living room carpet, something you have told her not to do because you don't want stains on the carpet.

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You have just accidentally knocked over a glass of juice that your child placed in the refrigerator without a cover. You have house rules against uncovered glasses in the refrigerator. Your child walks in as you are cleaning up the mess.

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Your child is bouncing a ball off the living room ceiling, right next to a vase that you really like.

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Your child is going through a phase of serving herself large portions of food at dinner, then not eating what she puts on her plate.

-----

While watching your child playing, you notice that he is pushing and bullying a smaller playmate.

-----

You discover that your child failed to give you a note from her teacher describing a discipline problem she has been having.



## Session Evaluation Partners in Parenting Session 4

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Please take a minute to give us some feedback about how you liked this session.

1. Use one word to describe your feelings about today's class \_\_\_\_\_
2. What was the most important thing you learned today?
3. In what situations do you plan to use I-Messages more often with your child (children)?

4. On a scale of 1 to 10, how do you rate today's class? (Circle your rating.)

01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10
Poor				Pretty Good					Excellent

5. Do you have any suggestions to help make this class better?