This module was developed as part of NIDA Grant DA06162, *Improving Drug Abuse Treatment for AIDS-Risk Reduction* (DATAR).

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# My Personal Rights

Objectives	<ol> <li>Participants will explore personal rights as a foundation for effective communication.</li> <li>Participants will identify the difference between "I-Messages" and "You-Messages."</li> <li>Participants will practice skills for effective communication in relationships.</li> </ol>
Rationale	Effective communication is based on the acceptance of a set of personal rights and responsibilities that mediate all interpersonal interactions. Beyond that, communication skills such as I-Messages, listening, and negotiation must be learned and practiced. This lesson explores these basic principles of effective communication and allows participants the opportunity to rehearse using them.
Materials	<ul> <li>Easel and paper flip chart or chalkboard</li> <li>Pencils; magic markers; masking tape; paper</li> <li>Strips of colored paper (3 strips per participant)</li> <li>Overhead transparencies: My Personal Rights</li> <li>I-Message vs. You-Message</li> <li>What Is an I-Message?</li> <li>What Does an I-Message Sound Like?</li> <li>Handouts:</li> <li>I-Message Worksheet</li> <li>Steps for I-Messages</li> <li>Tips for Better Listening</li> <li>Role play scripts (p. 36-37)</li> <li>Role play situations (p. 39)</li> <li>Session Evaluations</li> <li>Refreshments</li> </ul>

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# **Prepare Before**



#### **STEPS FOR I-MESSAGES**

Use **two sheets** of flip chart paper to print the steps shown below.

# STEPS FOR USING I-MESSAGES

State your **FEELINGS** 

Describe the **BEHAVIOR** 

Explain the **REASON** for your feelings (as needed)

Request a CHANGE or COMPROMISE

**LISTEN CAREFULLY** to the person's response

**ACKNOWLEDGE** the other person's feelings/needs

RESTATE your needs/ DISCUSS BENEFITS/CONSEQUENCES

NEGOTIATE, AS NEEDED

END ON A POSITIVE NOTE

# Prepare Before



### **I-MESSAGE INTERACTION**

Use **two sheets** of flip chart paper to write out the interaction shown below:

# **I-MESSAGE INTERACTION**

"When you leave dirty dishes in the sink (BEHAVIOR)

It makes me very angry (YOUR FEELINGS)

Because I end up doing all the work. (REASON)

Please wash your own dishes." (REQUEST CHANGE)

(Other person responds by saying he/she has been too busy to wash dishes) (LISTEN)

"I know you have been very busy and rushed, (ACKNOWLEDGE OTHER'S FEELINGS/NEEDS)

but I don't like being the only one who washes dishes. We would both have more time for relaxing if you would help share the work." (**RESTATE YOUR NEEDS/DISCUSS BENEFITS**)

(Other person agrees to rinse dishes and place them in dishwasher)

"That would help me a lot. I'm glad that we can talk together and work out our differences. Thank you for agreeing to help out." (NEGOTIATE/END ON A POSITIVE NOTE)

### Prepare Before Class



### TIPS FOR BETTER LISTENING

On a sheet of flip chart paper, list the following tips:

# TIPS FOR BETTER LISTENING

Look at the speaker. Don't interrupt.

Make a choice to WANT to listen.

Listen for the speaker's total meaning. (Words and feelings)

Check out your own understanding of what the speaker is trying to say and ask for feedback. For example:

"I hear you saying you're not happy about my decision to quit my job. Am I right?"

"You sound very worried about going to the doctor next week. Is that how you're feeling?"

### Prepare Before Class



#### Make copies of the following materials for each group member:

My Personal Rights (p. 42) I-Message vs. You-Message (p. 45) What Is an I-Message? (p. 43) What Does an I-Message Sound Like? (p. 44) Tips for Better Listening (p. 47) I-Message Worksheet (p. 48) Steps for I-Messages (p. 46) Role Play Scripts (p. 36-37) Role Play Situations (p. 39) Session Evaluations (pp. 49-50)

### Procedure

Welcome members to the group as they arrive. After everyone is seated, go around the group and ask members to introduce themselves and to share what their ideal, fantasy vacation would be. After everyone has introduced themselves, introduce yourself, and share your fantasy vacation.

Ask for a volunteer from last session to give a brief review of what was discussed. Thank the volunteer.



Using flipchart sheets from last session, briefly go over the *Group Goals* and the *Group Agreement*, if needed. (Both charts shown on p. 4.)

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Tell the group that today's session will continue to explore relationships and intimacy, and will focus on learning skills that will help in gaining control in life and improving relationships. Stress that the workshop will concentrate on relationships with partners/significant others, although many of the basic skills that will be learned and practiced are helpful for all interpersonal relationships.



Ask members to share with the group a recent relationship difficulty they may have experienced. List the gist of the relationship issues that are mentioned (for example: husband doesn't listen; boyfriend won't help with chores; friend always wanting to borrow money, etc.). After getting three or four examples, ask volunteers to share how they usually deal with these problems. Lead a brief discussion about the feelings involved in interpersonal difficulties using the following points:

### Discussion Guide

How does it feel to have a communication difficulty with someone you care about?

Have you ever had a misunderstanding, and later wished you hadn't said some of the things you said? What does that feel like?

What types of attitudes are likely to cause you to feel upset with another person? Why? How do you usually handle it?

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Tell the group that this session will explore the idea of effective communication. Define it as a way of communicating that allows us to take control over our lives and helps build better relationships. Explain that when we communicate effectively, we express our feelings and needs honestly, and we are willing to listen to and respect the needs and feelings of others. Two things are needed: (1) a belief in our right to communicate effectively and (2) practice, practice,

Explain that today's session will address both these issues. Introduce the concept of *Personal Rights* as rights that promote respect and equality in relationships. Use overhead of *My Personal Rights* to lead discussion (example on following page). Distribute handouts.

### **MY PERSONAL RIGHTS**

I have the right to control my life, therefore I have the right to...

Ask for what I want. To say "No" and not feel guilty. To decide how I spend my own time. To make mistakes. To express what I feel or think. To express what I feel or think. To ask questions. To change my mind. To say "I don't know." To think before I act. To ask for help. To be treated with respect. To feel good about myself. To decide if I want to assert a personal right.

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#### Read each right aloud and ask group members:

(See Discussion Guide next page.)

*Source: The concept of "Personal Rights" is from Lange & Jakubowski,* "Responsible Assertive Behavior"

### Discussion Guide

Do you agree that this is a personal right? Why? Why not?

How would you assert this personal right?

Discuss the last right – the right to decide if one wants to assert a personal right – in terms of personal safety.

Point out that personal safety should always take priority over absolute assertion of Personal Rights. Unfortunately, there are individuals who violently attempt to override the rights of others. Note that relationships with people who are verbally or physically abusive when we attempt to assert our personal rights might benefit from counseling.



#### Lead the group in the following activity:

Hand out three slips of paper to each participant.

Ask them to write on each slip of paper one of the Personal Rights that is the most important to them. Each participant should end up with the three rights most important to them written out on three slips of paper.

Tell the group that you want them to "surrender" or "give up" one of their rights. You may embellish by saying: "Suppose someone was going to make you give up one of these rights that you feel are most important to you. Which one would you be willing to 'sacrifice' or 'give up'?" Go around the room and ask members to hand you the slip of paper containing their choice of an important right to be surrendered.

Once you've collected the slips, repeat the procedure. You may say something like: "Now, suppose you were going to be forced to give up yet another right that you cherish. Of the two remaining, which would you surrender, and which would you keep?" Go around and collect the slips with the rights that members would surrender next.

Next go around the room and ask each member which right she held on to. Which right would she refuse to surrender? Ask why that right was kept above the others.\*

\*Exercise adapted from Beresford, "How to Be a Trainer"

Lead a brief discussion to process this exercise using the following points:

Discussion Guide

How did it feel to be asked to give up a right that is important to you?

In real life are there rights that we sometimes surrender without being forced? Which ones?

If these are Personal Rights, it means that all people have them. How can we make sure we don't violate the Personal Rights of others?



Thank participants for their involvement in the exercise. Explain that the first step toward effective communication is learning to use **I-Message statements and to listen carefully to others.** I-Message statements allow us to put our Personal Rights into practice and to respect the Personal Rights of others. Use What Is an I-Message? (p. 43) and What Does an I-Message Sound Like? (p. 44) overheads to lead discussion. Distribute handouts.

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Ask for feedback to determine if members understand the differences between the two types of statements. The following questions can be used:

### Discussion Guide

How does it feel when someone aims a You-statement at you? How would you respond if someone said to you: "You are so stupid. You don't understand anything I say!!" Compare this to someone saying: "I don't think you understood what I said. Let me try saying it a different way."

Which style will have the greatest chance of getting you what you want or need from another person?

You may want to break this concept down. It's an important one. Use the above example to discuss the points below:

- \* Your need or want: To be understood
- You-Message style: Alienates; causes anger
- I-Message style: Clarifies your need/want



Use overhead of *I-Message vs. You-Message* (p. 45) to review what an I-Message expresses. **Distribute handouts.** Find opportunities to compare and contrast I-Messages to You-Messages. Ask group for examples.



Use prepared flip chart of *Steps for I-Messages* (p. 26), *I-Message Interaction* (p. 27), and *Tips for Better Listening* (p. 28) to discuss how I-Messages are used and the importance of listening to people's response. Use tape or tacks to hang the charts so they are visible. **Distribute handouts** (pp. 46-47). After discussing each chart, distribute *I-Message Worksheets* (p. 48). Ask members to create an I-Message response for each of the three situations on the worksheet. When members have completed their worksheets, go around the room and ask for volunteers to read out responses to the three examples. Discuss and offer feedback. Stress the following points:



**KEY POINT:** We have the right to use I-Messages to exercise our personal rights, and to get our needs met. But other people will have reactions to our I-Messages. Therefore, we have to be willing to listen. It is important to listen to both the words and the feelings of others. Effective listening allows us to discover ways of getting our needs met, while respecting the other person's needs.

**KEY POINT: Timing** is an important consideration in effective communication. If we are very emotional or feeling upset or angry, taking time to "cool off" or get our emotions under control can help improve communication effectiveness. In some cases, it's more effective to bring up someone's troubling behavior at a time when that behavior isn't happening. For example, if a partner often comes home drunk, it's probably more effective to discuss the issue the next day when the partner is sober and emotions are more tranquil. Always remember that personal safety should take priority over insisting on effective communication.

**KEY POINT:** The steps for using an I-Message can be switched around to suit your own personal style. In other words, you may feel more comfortable by stating your feelings first, then the behavior that bothers you, and then your request. Review your I-Message worksheets to help find your own style.

**KEY POINT:** Negotiation is an important skill. Relationships are happier if both people are getting what they need. However, negotiation doesn't mean backing down from your needs. Also, for each of us there are things that may not be open for negotiation; for example, taking part in dangerous or illegal activities.

**KEY POINT:** When we use I-Messages to get our needs met, it's important to focus on the **behavior** of the other person, not his/ her **personality** or **assumed motives**. This is a big difference between I-Messages and You-Messages.



Ask for volunteers to practice using I-Messages and contrasting them with You-Messages. Pair volunteers and distribute I-Message scripts. Have the volunteers read the I-Message scripts aloud, and ask the remaining members to observe and listen. Do the 2 scripts (pp. 36-37), stopping after each one to discuss the situation with the group and answer questions. Ask readers to replay the script using You-Messages.



**SITUATION:** Joe gets off work at 9:00 p.m. Mary has to get up for work at 6:00 a.m. Joe likes to watch T.V. in bed, often catching the late show. This is keeping Mary from getting the rest she needs.

**TIMING ISSUE:** Mary decides to talk to Joe on a Saturday afternoon, when they are both rested and relaxed, rather than when she is irritable and trying to sleep.

**MARY:** Joe, I'd like for you to consider moving the television into the living room, rather than have it in the bedroom. You sometimes watch T.V. until 2 or 3 in the morning and it keeps me awake. I'm not getting the rest I need and I'm concerned that it may begin to affect my job.

**JOE:** But I like watching T.V. in bed. Besides that, I like having you next to me.

**MARY:** (LISTENS) I know you do. I like having you next to me, too. But the T.V. keeps me awake and I'd really like to try moving it into the living room.

JOE: Well, okay...but I'm not going to like it much.

**MARY:** (LISTENS) I understand. We'll try it for a while and see how it goes, okay? (OPEN TO NEGOTIATE IN FUTURE.) I really appreciate that you are willing to give it a try. (END ON A POSITIVE NOTE.)



**SITUATION:** Mary has gained about 10 pounds and feels bad about it. Joe keeps making snide remarks and pressuring her to lose weight.

**TIMING ISSUE:** Joe has just made a nasty remark. Mary decides to speak up about it.

JOE: I think I'll start calling you "CRISCO," you know, fat in the can.

**MARY:** Joe, I want you to stop making remarks about my weight. It makes me feel hurt and angry. I am trying to lose the extra weight, and what I need is your support instead of all this teasing.

**JOE:** Hey, lighten up. I'm just joking with you. I don't mean it seriously.

**MARY:** (LISTENS) I understand that you are just kidding around. But I need for you to understand how I feel when I hear those jokes. I feel ashamed about this extra weight and the jokes hurt.

JOE: I'm not trying to hurt you. But I think you need to lose weight.

**MARY:** (LISTENS) Joe, I know you're not trying to hurt me. And I'm very clear about your preferences as far as my weight is concerned. I want to lose the weight for myself, too. I know I'll lose it faster if I have your support and encouragement, rather than jokes and snide remarks.

JOE: Okay...okay...I'll lay off.

**MARY:** I want you to know I love you and I appreciate that you are willing to give me the support I need.

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#### 

See Appendix A for a discussion of role playing and tips for introducing your group to role plays. **Explain the concept of role playing.** Tell participants that role plays allow for the rehearsal and practice of communication skills, such as I-Messages, listening, and negotiation. Role playing should be fun, but also serious. It's important to stick to the subject, and try consciously to use and practice the skills discussed. Ask participants to play the roles realistically, using their own reactions, or drawing on reactions of partners or people they know. The "key" player, or person wanting to assert herself in the scenes, should try to use the skills discussed in this session.



Ask the group members to volunteer a few interpersonal situations that are going on in their lives to see if I-Messages can be used to improve communication in relationships. Have the person who volunteers the situation play the part of the person with whom she wants to communicate more effectively, and you play the part of the volunteer. Do one situation this way, for practice. (Example: "Okay, Mary — you play your husband and I'll play you. We'll do a little scene about requesting him to be more helpful around the house, okay?")



**Distribute copies of the role play situtations on page 39.** Ask for two volunteers to role play, and one volunteer to serve as observer. Allow volunteers to choose the role play they like best. Arrange chairs so that role players can face each other and the observer can sit beside them. Encourage role players to refer to the flip charts of *Steps for I-Messages* and *Tips for Better Listening*. Do at least 2 role plays, switching volunteers. Stop after each role play and process using questions on page 40.



Mandy and Andy are a couple. Andy was suppose to be home for dinner right after work. Instead, he shows up hours later, explaining that he went out with the guys for a few beers. He is obviously drunk.

When will Mandy speak her mind? How will she say it?



Joan and Jack are a couple. Joan is worried because Jack continues to use cocaine and asks her to use some with him. Joan wants to stay clean and not relapse.

When will Joan bring it up. What will she say?



Anna and Harold have just met at a party. Anna isn't interested, but Harold keeps coming on strong. Anna has tried being polite, but now Harold is making unwelcome sexual suggestions. Anna decides to tell him off.

When will Anna speak her mind? What will she say?



Doris and Don have been dating for a few months. For the second time, Don has stood Doris up for a date. Don has just come around her house after standing her up the night before. Doris wants to tell him about it.

When will Doris tell him? What will she say?



### Discussion Guide

Process each role play with some of the following points:

(For the players) How did it feel to play these roles? Describe some feelings you experienced.

(For the "key" player) Did you feel comfortable using the effective communication techniques? (For coplayer) How did you find yourself responding to the communication techniques?

(For the observer) What did you notice about the interaction? Did the "key" player communicate effectively? What might she have done differently?

(For the group) What other strategies could the "key" player have used? (Ask specifically about use of I-Messages, listening, restating of needs, ending on a positive note.)

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**Thank the group for their participation and input**. Go around the room and ask each member to tell one thing they learned from today's lesson and one thing they think will be useful in their daily lives.



Summarize the session with the following points:



(continued next page)

**KEY POINT:** Effective communication requires practice. This workshop can only introduce the ideas and concepts (plant the seeds). The more we think about the option of using I-Messages and listening skills, the more likely we are to begin practicing. The more we practice, the easier and better it becomes.



(continued from previous page)

**KEY POINT:** Ultimately, we don't have control over other people, only ourselves. By learning effective communication, we increase the chances that our needs and wants will be heard. But there is no guarantee that other people will behave like we want, or even care what we want. An important goal of effective communication is to help us feel good about ourselves.

**KEY POINT:** All human beings have basic, personal rights, including the ones we discussed today. That means we have the **right** to exercise our rights, but always with the understanding that other people have the same rights. Often, people must negotiate to make sure that both people are getting what they need.

**KEY POINT:** Remember this quote from Alan Alda (who played Hawkeye on the TV series *MASH*): "Be fair with people. But then keep after them until they're fair with you."\*



Ask participants to complete a Session Evaluation (pp. 49-50) before they leave.

# **MY PERSONAL RIGHTS**

I have the right to control my life, therefore I have the right to...

Ask for what I want.

To say "No" and not feel guilty.

To decide how I spend my own time.

To make mistakes.

To express what I feel or think.

To ask questions.

To change my mind.

To say "I don't know."

To think before I act.

To ask for help.

To be treated with respect.

To feel good about myself.

To decide if I want to assert a personal right.

Source: Concept of "Personal Rights" from: Lange & Jakubowski, "Responsible Assertive Behavior"

# WHAT IS AN I-MESSAGE?

# It is a self-controlled style of expressing what you think, feel, believe, want, or need in a way that is respectful of other people's rights.

# HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF WHAT I-MESSAGES SAY:

I see	I think
I hear	I believe
I smell	I feel
I taste	I love
I want	I like
I need	I hope
I plan	I wish
I am	I will
I do	I don't
I would	I won't

# WHAT DOES AN I-MESSAGE SOUND LIKE?

I-MESSAGE	YOU-MESSAGE
"I feel very angry about what you did."	"You make me so mad!!!"
"I need to borrow the car."	"You never let me use the car."
"I would like for you to help your sister with her homework."	"You ought to help your sister with her homework."
"I don't understand why you are acting this way."	"You're acting this way because you want to get back at me."

### **I-MESSAGE VS. YOU-MESSAGE**

### **AN I-MESSAGE**

Is a statement that describes you

Is an expression of YOUR feelings and experience

Is authentic, honest, and believable

**Expresses your inner reality** 

Allows you to take responsibility for your feelings

Does NOT judge or interpret other people's feelings or actions

Inspires respect, trust, and cooperation from others

### AYOU-MESSAGE

Is most often used when we feel anger, embarrassment, fear, or hurt

Is often aggressive and accusatory

Diminishes the self-esteem of the person it's aimed at

Assumes that others are responsible for your feelings or concerns

Is often negative, judgmental, and nonrespectful

Can alienate people causing them to feel defensive, hurt, and resentful

For more about I-Messages and You-Messages, see Linda Evan's *Effectivess Training for Women*, available at 1-800-628-1197.

# **STEPS FOR I-MESSAGES**

State your FEELINGS Describe the BEHAVIOR Explain the REASON for your feelings (as needed) Request a CHANGE or COMPROMISE LISTEN CAREFULLY to the person's response ACKNOWLEDGE the other person's feelings/needs RESTATE your needs/ DISCUSS BENEFITS/CONSEQUENCES NEGOTIATE, AS NEEDED/END ON A POSITIVE NOTE

# **I-MESSAGE INTERACTION**

"When you leave dirty dishes in the sink (**BEHAVIOR**)

It makes me very angry (YOUR FEELINGS)

Because I end up doing all the work. (**REASON**)

Please wash your own dishes." (REQUEST CHANGE)

(Other person responds by saying he/she has been too busy to wash dishes) (**LISTEN**)

"I know you have been very busy and rushed, (ACKNOWLEDGE OTHER'S FEELINGS/NEEDS)

but I don't like being the only one who washes dishes. We would both have more time for relaxing if you would help share the work." (**RESTATE YOUR NEEDS/DISCUSS BENEFITS**)

(Other person agrees to rinse dishes and place in dishwasher.)

"That would help me a lot. I'm glad that we can talk together and work out our differences. Thank you for agreeing to help out." (NEGOTIATE/END ON A POSITIVE NOTE)

## **TIPS FOR BETTER LISTENING**

Look at the speaker. Don't interrupt.

Make a choice to WANT to listen.

Listen for the speaker's total meaning. (Words and feelings)

Check out your own understanding of what the speaker is trying to say and ask for feedback. For example:

"I hear you saying you're not happy about my decision to quit my job. Am I right?"

"You sound very worried about going to the doctor next week. Is that how you're feeling?" My Personal Rights

# **I-MESSAGE WORKSHEET**

An I-Message is used to express your feelings, thoughts, and needs. In relationships, I-Messages are useful for expressing your feelings about another person's behavior and for requesting a change.

Use the Steps for I-Messages to complete the following interactions.

1. Your partner has been late for dinner for three nights in a row.

(Behavior)	When you
(Feelings)	I feel
(Reason)	Because
(Request)	I want

2. Your friend borrows your clothes and then fails to return them for several weeks.

(Request)	I would like
(Feelings)	I feel
(Behavior)	When you
(Reason)	Because

3. Your partner is often unwilling to help out with household chores.

(Feelings)	I feel
(Behavior)	When you
(Reason)	Because
(Request)	I want

#### Session 2

### SESSION EVALUATION OF "TIME OUT! FOR ME"

### **SESSION 2**

THIS B	OX IS TO BE COMPLETED BY DATA COORDINATOR:	[	FORM 64;	CARD 01]
SITE #	_  CLIENT ID#   _ _ _ _  DATE:   _  _  _  _  _  [5-6] [7-12] MO DAY YR [13-18]	COUNS	elor id#	_  [19-20]
	STRUCTIONS: Please answer the following questions based on what you learned in rcle 1 (True) or 2 (False) after each statement.	today's	session.	7
		True	False	
1.	An I-Message is a respectful way of expressing your feelings about someone's behavior.	1	2	[21]
2.	If you exercise your personal rights it means you may say "No" and not feel guilty.	1	2	
3.	Sometimes it is helpful to negotiate with other people in order to get what we want	1	2	[23]
4.	It is easy to listen carefully to what other people have to say	1	2	
5.	If you use I-Messages, you will always get what you want from other people	1	2	[25]
6.	When you use an I-Message, you should point out the other person's character flaws.	1	2	
7.	A You-Message may cause the person receiving it to become defensive	1	2	[27]
8.	After delivering an I-Message, it is important to listen to the other person's reaction	1	2	
9.	It is not necessary to practice communicating effectively because most people do it naturally.	1	2	[29]

[\_\_\_\_ [31-32]

*Time Out! For Me* Session 2 Evaluation Page 2

**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 this class.

2. What is the most important thing you learned today?

3. List two **personal rights** that are the most important to you. Why are they the most important?

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							Exce	llent

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