

Segment: Negotiation Strategy v. Style

Lesson Title: Lesson 1: I-Messages

Grade Band: 6-12

Approximate Time to Complete: 35 minutes

Objectives: Students will be able to use statements that begin with the word “I” to convey information and feelings in an assertive, respectful manner.

Materials/Set up:

- Communication I-Way Worksheet (one per student)
- Preparing I-Messages Worksheet (one per student)

Resources:

- Online Video Clip - [James Baker: The Man Who Made Washington Work: The Peacemaker](#) (Watch 1:36-2:32)

Overview

“I” messages are cited as an effective conflict management tool. Often introduced in elementary school, the I-message may feel stilted or disingenuous for older students. Adjusting and reinforcing I-statements for older students encourages them to communicate how they are individually impacted by a situation and is a form of assertive communication. This lesson includes class discussion and paired exercises.

Instructional Plan

1. Introduce traditional I-message formula: I feel _____, when you _____ and I want you to _____.

Note: This formula actually contains two “you” messages that can put the receiver of the statement on the defensive. The formula also encourages students to adopt a positional problem solving technique by using a phrase that begins with “I want.” Positional problem solving occurs when a speaker states a position by saying “I want,” instead of using a statement that reflects **why** the individual wants something.

Explain that the goals of I-messages include: (To provide a visual for the students, these goals are also provided at the top of the Communication I-Way Worksheet).

- a) To avoid using a “you” statement that will escalate the conflict
 - b) To respond in a way that will de-escalate the conflict
 - c) To identify feelings
 - d) To identify behaviors that are causing the conflict
 - e) To help individuals resolve the present conflict and/or prevent future conflict
 - f) To explain the impact of behaviors on others
2. State, “I statements express the sender’s feelings, identify the unwanted behavior, and indicate a willingness to resolve the dispute without using “you” statements or engaging in positional problem solving. How can a speaker use a statement that begins with “I” without using positional “you” statements?”
 3. Play Online Video Clip - [James Baker: The Man Who Made Washington Work: The Peacemaker](#) (Watch 1:36-2:32) In this clip Baker is having trouble negotiating with President Assad, because Assad keeps going back on his promises. After watching the video ask students what Baker said and what strategy he used to change the conversation with Assad. Baker challenges Assad by saying, “Well, then there is not much point in my being here”. This is a sophisticated use of an I-message (even though Baker never actually says “I”): Baker conveys his complaint without accusing Assad of going back on his word. Ask : “ How would Baker’s complaint have sounded as a “you” statement (“You keep going back on your word” “You keep welshing on your promises”)?. Ask: “Do you think Assad would have been more upset by a “you” message?”
 4. Explain how it is harder to negotiate (when two or more people try to allocate resources or make a decision toward an agreed upon outcome) and get what you want when someone else is angry at you or confused by your statement. I-messages give important information about ourselves quickly, clearly, and in a way that encourages the other person to work with us to find a solution.
 5. Distribute the Preparing I-Messages Worksheet and read it over with students.
 6. Distribute the Communication I-Way Worksheet.
 7. Go over situations 1 and 2 on the Communication I-Way Worksheet. (See the Communication I Way Educator Resource for suggested solutions to situations 3-

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- 5). Ask the students to work in pairs to complete situations 3-5 on the Communication I-Way Worksheet.
8. As students report out their responses, discuss adjustments or make corrections as necessary.
9. Ask, “How do I-statements relate to effective negotiation? Think back to the James Baker example. How does the use of an “I-statement” versus a “you-statement” impact finding an agreement?” In negotiation, both parties usually have an idea of what they want, or want to happen. An “I-statement” allows a party to express emotions and personal views without putting the other party on the defensive. When parties are on the defensive, they tend to stop communicating, repeat their position, or use language which attacks the other party. These defensive communication techniques are more likely to prevent the parties from reaching an agreement.
10. Depending on the responses, share: “In general “I-statements” help de-escalate conflict because they provide information from a personal perspective rather than a “you-statement’ which is perceived as a statement/attack on someone else.”
11. A strategic negotiator can use both “I-statements” and “you-statements” to emphasize points, de-escalate a situation, and identify common ground.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Communication I-Way

Below are several conflict situations. Please construct an I-statement for each situation.

Goals of I-messages include:

- To avoid using a “you” statement that will escalate the conflict
- To respond in a way that will de-escalate the conflict
- To identify feelings
- To identify behaviors that are causing the conflict
- To help individuals resolve the present conflict and/or prevent future conflict
- To explain the impact of behaviors on others

Remember the following guides when making an I-statement:

- No “you” statements
- Use the word “I”
- State how you feel
- State the specific behavior you don’t like
- State your willingness to cooperatively resolve the problem

Situations

Situation 1: Chloe is yelling at J’Nai because J’Nai changed the channel on the television from MTV to EPSN. Chloe is calling J’Nai names and telling her to turn it back or else Chloe will pound her.

J’Nai says to Chloe:

Situation 2: Monica heard from a friend that her friend Angela was trying to steal Monica’s boyfriend.

Monica says to Angela:

Name: _____

Date: _____

Situation 3: Monroe is two minutes late for class for third time in two weeks and the teacher does not appreciate his lateness.

The teacher says to Monroe:

Situation 4: Pepe received the highest grade on the test. Naomi grabbed Pepe's test off his desk to look at his grade then announced it to the class.

Pepe says to Naomi:

Situation 5: Jerome is walking to his locker when an older student bumps into him and then begins yelling at Jerome for being stupid and clumsy.

Jerome says to the older student:

Name: _____

Date: _____

Preparing I-Messages

When we talk about difficult situations, those about which we have strong feelings, we need to be careful about how we say things. We don't want to make the situation worse by angering or confusing the other person. In fact, it is harder to negotiate and get what you want when someone else is angry at you or confused by your statement. We need to be able to give important information about ourselves quickly, clearly, and in a way that encourages the other person to work with us to find a solution.

Some Suggestions For I-Messages

- ✓ **Talk about yourself, about what you feel, need, want, and think.**
"I have a problem, I feel angry. I need more clarity from you about when you will be home from band practice. It is important to me to be able to plan the rest of my day."
- ✓ **Begin your statements with "I," rather than with "You."**
"I feel scared when you don't respond to my texts." is more likely to be heard than, "You don't care what I think. You purposefully avoid responding to my text because you know it worries me!"
- ✓ **Use neutral language, and be as specific as possible.**
"I can never count on you" is vague and accusatory, but "I got angry when you forgot to pick me up yesterday" provides specific information about how someone's actions made you feel.
- ✓ **Do not call names, blame, characterize, or judge.**
"You are so stupid, People like you never remember to write down assignment deadlines. You'll never improve your organization habits." These statements only anger the other person.
- ✓ **State your positive intentions to resolve the conflict.**
"This difficulty between us really concerns me. I think if we sit down and talk, we can make things better. I'm willing to spend the time necessary to improve the situation."
- ✓ **Tell the other person that you want to listen to his or her viewpoint.**
"I realize we may see this problem in a different way. Your point of view is important to me. I will make time to listen to everything you have to say about this problem."

Name: _____

Date: _____

Communication I-Way

Educator Resource

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- State your willingness to cooperatively resolve the problem

Situations

Situation 1: Chloe is yelling at J’Nai because J’Nai changed the channel on the television from MTV to EPSN. Chloe is calling J’Nai names and telling her to turn it back or else Chloe will pound her.

J’Nai says to Chloe:

Traditional I-message: “I feel angry when you call me names and yell at me and I want you to stop it.”

New I-message: “Hey, Chloe, chill. I’m starting to get angry. I don’t like it when people call me names and threaten me. I didn’t know that changing the channel was such a big deal. Can we work this out like friends?”

Situation 2: Monica heard from a friend that her friend Angela was trying to steal Monica’s boyfriend.

Monica says to Angela:

Name: _____

Date: _____

Traditional I-message: “I feel angry when you try to take my boyfriend and I want you to leave him alone.”

New I-message: “I feel awkward because I heard a rumor about my boyfriend. Will you help me get to the bottom of this?”

Situation 3: Monroe is two minutes late for class for third time in two weeks and the teacher does not appreciate his lateness.

The teacher says to Monroe:

Traditional I-message: “I feel aggravated when you come to my class late and I want you to be on time from now on.”

New I-message: “Monroe, I am glad to see you in class today. When a student enters class late it is disruptive to me and the other students. Let’s talk after class and work out a solution.”

Situation 4: Pepe received the highest grade on the test. Naomi grabbed Pepe’s test off his desk to look at his grade then announced it to the class.

Pepe says to Naomi:

Traditional I-message: “I was embarrassed when you grabbed my test and told the whole class my score.”

New I-message: “It was embarrassing to me when my grade was announced to the entire class. I prefer to keep information about my grades private. If you want to see my test would just ask me next time.”

Situation 5: Jerome is walking to his locker when an older student bumps into him and then begins yelling at Jerome for being stupid and clumsy.

Jerome says to the older student:

Traditional I-message: “I feel disrespected when you bump into me and yell at me and I want you to stop.”

New I-message: “Let’s calm down. I am starting to feel disrespected by these names over what may have been an accident.”