

Assertiveness is a clear, honest, and direct way of communicating. It means expressing yourself in a way that shows respect for you and the other person. An effective way to do this is using “I-Messages” or “I-Statements”.

I-messages begin with “I” (for example, “I feel overwhelmed when I have so much work to do”) instead of “you” (for instance, “You overwhelm me when you give me so much work”). These statements help you take responsibility for your feelings and reactions without blaming other people, making it easier for them to listen and understand. Using I-messages also reduces the chance that the other person will become defensive or feel judged, which is a common reaction to “you-messages”.

There are three types of I-Messages:

“I feel...” Assertively expressing your feelings and emotions

These statements help you share your feelings about an issue. They are useful when you want to talk about how someone’s behavior affects you without being critical or judgmental.

“I was upset when you didn’t call.”

“I feel ashamed when you comment on how I look.”

“I feel happy when we spend time together.”

“I think...” Assertively expressing your thoughts and opinions

These statements help you share your thoughts, opinions, and feedback clearly and respectfully. You can also use them to praise and compliment other people.

“I think we don’t spend enough time together.”

“In my opinion, this is the best solution.”

“I think you handled that really well.”

“I need...” Assertively expressing your wants and needs

These statements help you express your needs and preferences honestly and directly. They make it easier for others to understand how to support you, even if they can’t always meet your needs.

“I need help with this.”

“I want some time to think.”

“I’d like more moments like this with you.”

How can I make my I messages most effective?

Be focused

Keep your I-message short and simple, focusing on one issue at a time. This will make your statement is easy to understand and won’t overwhelm the other person.



Be specific

Make your I-message clear and direct – don’t assume the other person knows what you think or feel. For example, if you want to express how someone’s behavior made you feel, make sure you refer to what they have done (e.g., “I felt hurt when you didn’t include me”).



Be respectful

Don’t label the other person or call them names. Rather than commenting on their character (e.g., “You’re selfish”), focus on your feelings about their behavior (e.g., “I feel sad when you make plans without me”).



Be timely

It’s best to use I-messages before your feelings build up. If you feel upset or overwhelmed, give yourself some time to cool down so you can express yourself calmly and listen.

