

COMMUNICATION IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP

In this section we discuss some communication skills that can help you have productive conversations with your partner.



When thinking about relationship issues, many people think that more communication might be the solution. However, it's important to recognize that **the frequency of communication is likely not the issue.** We are always communicating. Whether it's with our silence, our body language, or our tone of voice. Instead, what needs to improve is the **quality** of communication. The worksheet will help you to practice advanced communication through I-statements. You can also practice reflective listening as you share the statements.

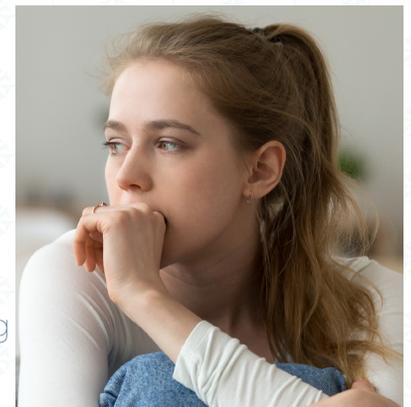
I-Statements

I-statements can be important to use as a foundation. There is a basic formula for this that can be built on to better communicate your thoughts and feelings. This formula is as follows:

I feel _____ when _____. I feel this way because _____. In the future, I hope _____.

The key here is **taking ownership of your own thoughts and feelings.** You need to show your partner that you know that your feelings are unique to you and that not everyone else would feel the same way. What bothers one person might not bother another, and why it bothers you is unique to you.

Consider a married couple where one spouse is an introvert and needs alone time to recharge. In this case she may consider it a blessing when her partner decides to go out with friends once a week. Contrast this with a couple where the spouse was abandoned by her parents. How might she react differently to her spouse's desire to spend time with friends? **The behavior of the spouse who wants to spend time with friends is the same in both scenarios.** How do we explain the difference? Understanding this principle it should change how you approach I-statements.



REFLECTIVE LISTENING

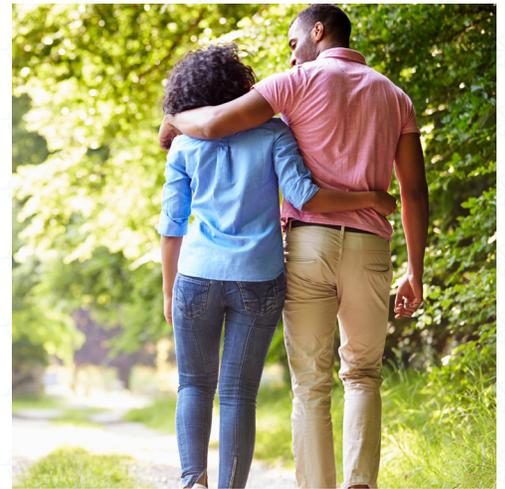
The key point here is that **couples need to take turns when they are discussing difficult topics**. It does not matter if you agree with what your partner is saying. With reflective listening you are simply **showing that you are hearing what they are saying**. Imagine a man with a history of drug abuse practicing this communication technique while talking with his wife. The man starts by saying, "I really want to use drugs..." at which point his wife erupts and starts saying things like "I can't believe we wasted all this money on treatment," and "What's wrong with you, don't you know this is ruining our life?"



Needless to say, it went downhill fast. After a lot of effort is spent to de-escalate the wife, she agrees to listen to her husband. He then says, "I really want to use drugs, **but** I know I can't anymore and need to change." **Sometimes the reason arguments get out of control as quickly as they do is because people don't listen to an entire statement.** In turn, they become very reactive.

ADVANCED COMMUNICATION

Basic communication can be used to tackle a wide variety of problems and concerns, but it doesn't always get to the **heart of the problem**. In couples with conflict, the problem is not usually just how they communicate, it's also about what they communicate about. More accurately, it's what they don't communicate about. **Most of the time couples decide that what they need to argue about is the things that are safe to argue about.** Such as the garbage being taken out, how children are raised, how much time is spent at work, finances, etc. You often hear people say that finances are the number one reason for divorce. In reality, it's rare to find a divorce over finances alone. Yes, a couple may argue about finances, but it's usually really an issue of trust, betrayal, etc. that is the core problem. Finances are just easier to argue about than those things, so they focus on that instead of recognizing the underlying issues. In advanced communication we try to **get to the core issues and the heart of the matter**. A few examples of the difference between the two might be helpful:



Safe

"What is wrong with you? Why didn't you take out the trash? You are lazy!"

Advanced

"I've had a really exhausting day and I feel overwhelmed. I need your help and support to get through everything. This includes chores."

WORKSHEET: COMMUNICATION IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP

In this worksheet you will practice using I-statements, reflective listening, and advanced communication with your partner.

I-STATEMENT FORMULA

I feel _____ when _____. I feel this way because _____. In the future, I hope _____.

We can see that there are four components to building an I-statement. You will:

- Identify the emotion you are feeling (angry, sad, disappointed, etc.)
- Identify the situation that is triggering this feeling
- Try to understand why this trigger would cause this feeling
- Identify what you would like to see happen in the future.

Think of a recent situation with your partner that upset you. Go through the steps to write an effective I-statement that you can share with them.

EMOTION	SITUATION	WHY	FUTURE
Anger, Frustration	Partner did not take out the garbage when it was full	I am stressed out at work and feel overwhelmed when I come home to a mess.	In the future I would like for us all to do better at taking the trash out if it is full.

I-STATEMENT: *I feel angry when you do not take the garbage out when it is full. I feel this way because I am stressed out at work and feel overwhelmed when I come home to a mess. In the future I would like for all of us to do better at taking the garbage out if it is full.*

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