

Lesson Twelve: "I" Sentences

Learning Goals:

Students will learn to express themselves assertively, using "I" sentences. Assertive communication will prevent a child from using bully actions and victim responses.

Background:

In order to teach "I" sentences (or "I" sentences), you must understand what they are and how they are used.

Using "I" sentences can help to clarify thoughts and express your desire to deal with conflict in a positive manner. An "I" sentence is made of three parts.

1. "I feel ..."

Starting off with your emotions about the situation puts the focus on you, the speaker. A sentence that begins with "You..." will most often be seen by the person you're talking to as blaming, or accusing. Starting off a conversation by blaming someone puts up walls that makes further positive discussion difficult. Starting off with emotion reveals true effects of the situation that must be resolved.

"I feel angry."

"I feel anxious."

"I feel stressed."

2. "When ..." or "About the ..." or "About my ..."

The second part of an "I" sentence involves naming the action that distresses you. Be concrete and specific in this part of the sentence. Don't put in any assumptions. This must be only facts, and also must be non-blaming and non-judgmental.

"I feel angry when your tone of voice sounds angry to me."

"I feel anxious when you stay out really late."

"I feel stressed about my workload."

3. "Could we try...?" or "I'd like us to talk about it and see what we come up with." or "What if we..." or "I'd like to try..."

The third part of an "I" sentence looks toward the future and suggests options for resolution. This can take many forms, but again works best if it remains non-blaming and non-judgmental. Who wants to work towards a solution when they feel judged and blamed?!

To put it all together then:

"I feel angry when your tone of voice sounds angry to me. I would appreciate talking in a calm way."

"I feel anxious about the report getting done on time. I'd like to discuss ways that we can be sure the work gets done."

"I feel stressed about my workload. I'd like to talk about it with you and see what we come up with."

SAMPLE LESSONS

Elementary

Brainstorming:

How do you feel when someone cuts in front of you? How do you feel when someone takes your turn in a game?

Storytelling:

Write a story about learning to express your feelings when you lose your turn.

Role-playing:

Perform the story from the point of view of the guest on a talk show!

Journaling:

Create a poster letting the class know that everyone deserves a turn.

Middle School

Brainstorming:

How do you feel about your household chores? Are they fair to you?

Storytelling:

Write the story of a group of students who go on strike from household chores, wanting better conditions.

Role-playing:

Create a news show to cover the story!

Journaling:

Create a poster advertising the show with "film at 11."

High School

Brainstorming:

What bothers you most about how people are treated in your school?

Storytelling:

Write a news story about a group of students who protest the way they are treated by popular kids.

Role-playing:

Create a news show to cover the story!

Journaling:

Create a video of the show!

Plan ahead. In the beginning, using “I” sentences will feel awkward and new. It will be necessary to work at the phrasing and to think about what you are going to say. If all you can come up with is: “I feel angry when you breathe, could you please stop,” you must work harder at identifying the specific issues!

Being assertive means choosing how to react; not just reacting. Taking the time to decide what you will say is choosing how you will react. These examples of “I” sentences show ways you can start off a difficult conversation. “I” sentences can also be used throughout a conversation in order to clearly express your feelings and wishes.

The following gives you other language to explain “I” sentences to children:

1. An “I” Sentence starts with “I” because then the focus is on you. They use feelings, because it’s pretty hard to argue with feelings. If you say you are sad or angry, then no one can really argue with that. How you feel is how you feel.

- ⤴ I feel sad
- ⤴ I feel sorry

2. The middle part of an “I” sentence tells what is happening.

- ⤴ I feel sad when I am hit.
- ⤴ I feel sorry that I hit you.

3. The next sentence has answers to the problem.

- ⤴ I feel sad when I am hit. Please don’t hit me anymore.
- ⤴ I feel sorry that I hit you. I won’t hit you anymore.

Bystanders can also use “I sentences”, for example, stating “I am upset when I see people being mistreated. I need you to stop that.”

General Activities (all ages):

Use the following scenarios to practice making “I” sentences.

There is a girl that you only see in the hallways who comments on your clothes each day at school. You don’t appreciate her commentaries. Use an “I” sentence to tell her how you feel and what you want her to do. (You are a bystander, how can you use an “I” sentence to intervene?)

A friend is pressuring you to use drugs and you don’t want to. How can you say no, using an “I” sentence? (You are a bystander, how can you use an “I” sentence to intervene?)

You are standing in line at a drinking fountain and someone pushes ahead of you. What will you say? Use an “I” sentence. (You are a bystander, how can you use an “I” sentence to intervene?)

You are eating in the cafeteria and another student comes in, threatens you and takes your lunch. Use an “I” Sentence to the student. (You are a bystander, how can you use an “I” sentence to intervene?)

Your friend always wants to borrow money from you. He has asked again and you can’t lend him any more money until he has paid you what he owes you. Use an “I” sentence to tell him so.

Your household chore is taking out the garbage and cleaning the bathroom. You hate these jobs. You would rather sweep the floor and vacuum the rugs. Use an “I” sentence to tell your mom or dad.

Notice that these are not all bullying scenarios – an “I” sentence is handy in many situations.

Use the above scenarios one at a time, and answer the following questions.

- ⤴ How would you handle it if you are assertive?
- ⤴ How would you handle it if you are aggressive?
- ⤴ How would you handle it if you are passive?
- ⤴ How would you handle it if you are passive-aggressive?

Using the ideas in the handouts, talk about how to handle each conflict. Talk about the situations one at a time and ask the following questions for all or some of the scenarios:

- ⤴ How would you handle it if you are assertive?
- ⤴ How would you handle it if you are aggressive?

- ⤴ How would you handle it if you are passive?
- ⤴ How would you handle it if you are passive-aggressive?

Use the role-play suggestions to provide opportunity to practice developing and using “I” sentences. If children are less developed in putting together information, class participation can be used in developing the “I” sentences in the role-play, resulting in a combination role-play/class discussion.

Elementary Role Plays:

- ⤴ You are on the playground playing tag, and one boy keeps trying to push you over when he tags. Use an “I” sentence to the student.
- ⤴ Your household chore is taking out the garbage. You hate it. You would rather sweep the floor. Use an “I” sentence to tell your mom or dad.
- ⤴ You see some children bullying another child. You have seen it three times, and you are going to tell your teacher. Use an “I” sentence to ask your teacher to talk about it with you.

Middle School Role Plays:

- ⤴ You are eating in the cafeteria and another student comes in, threatens you and takes your lunch. Use an “I” sentence to the student.
- ⤴ Your friend keeps on wanting to borrow money from you. He has asked again and you can’t lend him any more money until he has paid you what he owes you. Use an “I” sentence to tell him so.
- ⤴ Your household chore is taking out the garbage and cleaning the bathroom. You hate these jobs. You would rather sweep the floor and vacuum the rugs. Use an “I” sentence to tell your mom or dad.
- ⤴ Your friend is talking about engaging in a destructive act. You won’t agree to go along with it. Use an “I” sentence to tell him.

High School Role Plays:

- ⤴ You are eating in the cafeteria and another student comes in, threatens you and takes your lunch. Use an “I” sentence to the student.
- ⤴ Your friend keeps on wanting to borrow money from you. He has asked again and you can’t lend him any more money until he has paid you what he owes you. Use an “I” sentence to tell him so.
- ⤴ Your household chore is taking out the garbage and cleaning the bathroom. You hate these jobs. You would rather shovel the driveway and cut the grass. Use an “I” sentence to tell your mom or dad.
- ⤴ You have overloaded your class schedule and you need to make arrangements with your principal to make things more manageable. Use an I sentence to start off the conversation.
- ⤴ You walk by two girls who are being verbally cruel to another girl about her clothes. Use an “I” sentence to bring attention to it and perhaps shut it down.

Lesson 12

"I" Sentences

Point to yourself, really, point to yourself! You are "I"! An "I" sentence is about you. It is about how you feel, what you think, and what you hope will happen.

Here are some examples of "I" Sentences:

I feel sad when I am hit. Please don't hit me anymore.

I feel sorry that I hit you. I won't hit you anymore.

I feel angry when I can't play. I would like to play the next game with the team.

I feel upset when I see people being mean. Can I talk to you about what I saw?

An "I" sentence has three parts.

1. Do you see how they all start with "I"? They start with "I" and "Feel", because then the focus is on you.

I feel sad

I feel sorry

I feel angry

I feel upset

2. The middle part of an "I" sentence says what is happening.

I feel sad when I am hit.

I feel sorry that I hit you.

I feel angry when I can't play.

I feel upset when I see people being mean.

3. The next sentence has answers to the problem.

I feel sad when I am hit. Please don't hit me anymore.

I feel sorry that I hit you. I won't hit you anymore.

I feel angry when I can't play. I would like to play the next game with
the team.

I feel upset when I see people being mean. Can I talk to you about what I saw?

Let's Practice!

You are building in a sandbox and a girl or boy comes and kicks over your sandcastle.

What will you say? Use an "I" sentence.

A friend asks you if they can copy your homework. You don't want them to.

What will you say? Use an "I" sentence.

You are standing in line at a drinking fountain and someone pushes you.

What will you say? Use an "I" sentence.

You are sad because your favorite markers are all used up.

What will you say? Use an "I" sentence.

You are at a friend's birthday party. You have to leave the party early and want to make sure that you have a turn at the game, Pin the Tail on the Donkey first.

What will you say? Use an "I" sentence.

Can you think of other problems where an "I" sentence would be good?

Lesson 12

"I" Sentences

Taking the time to figure out what you want to say using an "I" Sentence allows you to act rather than react.

"I" sentences give you a respectful way to say how you are feeling and what you need. An "I" sentence has three parts:

1. An "I" Sentence starts with "I" because then the focus is on you. They use feelings, because it's pretty hard to argue with feelings. If you say you are sad or angry, then no one can really argue with that. How you feel is how you feel.

- I feel sad
- I feel sorry

2. The middle part of an "I" sentence tells what is happening.

- I feel sad when I am hit.
- I feel sorry that I hit you.

3. The next sentence has answers to the problem.

- I feel sad when I am hit. Please don't hit me anymore.
- I feel sorry that I hit you. I won't hit you anymore.

Practice!

There is a girl that you only see in the hallways who comments on your clothes each day at school. You don't appreciate her commentaries. Use an "I" sentence to tell her how you feel and what you want her to do.

A friend is pressuring you to have a cigarette and you don't want to. How can you say no, using an "I" sentence?

You are standing in line at a drinking fountain and someone pushes ahead of you. What will you say? Use an "I" sentence.

Lesson 12 “I” Sentences

When you start a discussion with “You” it will probably be seen as blaming. When you add “always” or “never”, “You always...” “You never...”, you set up a sentence that is easy to argue. This sets the scene for an aggressive discussion rather than an assertive discussion.

An “I” Sentence will give you an opportunity to say what you are feeling in the situation and what you would like to have happen. An “I” Sentence can be used to start off a difficult conversation or can be used throughout a difficult conversation. “I” Sentences can feel a bit awkward at first, but are a very effective communication tool. The awkwardness comes from needing to plan out what you are going to say rather than just blurting out something you might regret later. When you plan what you are going to say, you are taking the time to ACT instead of REACTING.

1. “I feel ”

Starting off with your emotions about the situation puts the focus on the speaker. A sentence that begins with “You...” will most often be seen by the other person as blaming, or accusing. Starting off a conversation by blaming someone puts up walls that makes further positive discussion difficult. Starting off with emotion puts the other person in mind that there are true effects of the situation that need to be resolved.

“I feel angry.”

“I feel anxious.”

“I feel stressed.”

2. “When ”

“About the ”

“About my ”

The second part of an “I” sentence involves naming the action that distresses you. It is important to be concrete and specific in this part of the sentence. Don't put in any assumptions. This must be only facts, and also needs to be non-blaming and non-judgmental.

“I feel angry when your tone of voice sounds angry to me.”

“I feel anxious about getting my homework done on time.”

“I feel stressed about the work I have to get done at home and at school.”

3. “Could we try...?”

“I'd like to talk about it with you and see what we come up with.”

“What if we...”

“I'd like to try...”

The third part of an “I” sentence looks toward the future and suggest options for resolution. This will take many forms, but again works best if it remains non-blaming and non-judgmental. Who wants to work towards a solution when they feel judged and blamed?!

To put it all together then:

“I feel angry when your tone of voice sounds angry to me. I would appreciate talking in a calm way.”

“I feel anxious about getting my homework done on time. I'd like to discuss some plans to be sure that the homework is done on time.”

"I feel stressed about the work I have to get done at home and at school I'd like to talk about it with you and see what we come up with."

Plan ahead. In the beginning, using "I" sentences will feel awkward and new. It will be necessary to work at the phrasing and to think about what you are going to say. If all you can come up with is: "I feel angry when you breathe, could you please stop," you will need to work harder at identifying the specific issues! Being assertive means choosing how you will react, instead of just reacting. Taking the time to decide what you will say is choosing how you will react.

Practice!

There is a boy that you see everyday by your locker who comments rudely about your clothes. You don't appreciate his commentaries. Use an "I" Sentence to tell him how you feel and what you want him to do.

A friend is pressuring you to have a drink and you don't want to.
How can you say no, using an "I" Sentence?

You are standing in line at the office and someone pushes ahead of you. What will you say? Use an "I" Sentence.

You are walking into your classroom when a big guy pushes past you, slamming you into the wall. This happens frequently and you decide to talk to a teacher about it. Use an "I" sentence to start the conversation.

Remember this!

For more aggressive situations, and I sentence may not be effective, and may feel too weak. When you need to, pull out the word "need". " I NEED...you to stop this." I NEED for us to resolve this". "I NEED you to back up."