

## Week 9: Interpersonal Effectiveness & Assertive Communication

### Objective:

This week, you will develop interpersonal effectiveness by practicing assertive communication, boundary-setting, and active listening. The goal is to enhance relationships, express needs clearly, and navigate difficult conversations with confidence.

### Part 1: Understanding Assertiveness

**Assertive communication involves expressing thoughts, feelings, and needs in a clear, respectful way. It differs from passive, aggressive, or passive-aggressive communication styles.**

**Describe a situation where you struggled to communicate assertively.**

**How did you respond? (Passive, aggressive, passive-aggressive, or assertive?)**

**What was the outcome of this communication style?**

**How could assertive communication have improved the situation?**

### Part 2: Practicing "I" Statements

**"I" statements help express thoughts and feelings without blaming or escalating conflict. The formula is:**

**"I feel [emotion] when [situation] because [reason]. I would like [request]."**

**Example: "I feel frustrated when meetings start late because it makes me fall behind on my work. I would like for us to start on time."**

**Write three "I" statements for situations where you want to express your needs or set a boundary.**

**1.**

**2.**

**3.**

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### **Part 4: Setting Boundaries**

**Setting boundaries means clearly defining what is acceptable and unacceptable in your interactions with others.**

**Identify one area in your life where you need stronger boundaries (e.g., work, relationships, personal time).**

**What boundary do you want to set?**

**How can you communicate this boundary assertively?**

**What challenges might arise, and how will you handle them?**

# USING “I-STATEMENTS”

The cornerstone of effective communication includes articulating your emotions and reasons in a manner that encourages the other party to listen. Finding the right words can be challenging, often leading to hurtful or accusatory exchanges. This behavior is sometimes dismissed as a byproduct of emotional turmoil, yet it fails to facilitate constructive problem-solving.

One common pitfall is the use of **"You"** statements instead of **"I"** statements. **"You"** statements, such as "You made me so mad" or "You always tease me," tend to convey blame and shame, hindering genuine expression of your feelings and shutting down communication. Consequently, constructive dialogue becomes elusive.

A more effective approach involves framing your emotions without resorting to blame or shame, thus creating a conducive environment for collaborative problem-solving. By utilizing **"I"** statements and expressing your feelings openly, you invite the other person to engage with you in finding mutually beneficial solutions.

## USING “I STATEMENTS”

**"I-statements"** provide a means of centering on oneself and conveying feelings in a constructive manner regarding the impact of a situation. These statements succinctly communicate your perspective without assigning blame or accusation. **"I-statements"** typically begin with phrases such as **"I feel..."**, **"I need..."**, or **"I struggle..."**. By initiating dialogue with **"I"** instead of **"You"**, you offer the other party insight into your emotions and requirements, fostering an environment of understanding and collaboration devoid of defensiveness or hostility.

*Example: Your partner maintains a busy schedule and prioritizes gym sessions several evenings per week, leaving you feeling isolated. A typical response might be, "You're constantly away, leaving me alone. Your work and gym routine seem to take precedence over our relationship." However, what you truly desire might be quality time with your partner. Unfortunately, such statements often come across as criticism or blame, triggering defensiveness and impeding effective communication. Consequently, the underlying issue persists unresolved.*

# ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION “I STATEMENTS”

**"I" statements are an excellent method for resolving conflicts. When someone feels blamed, they can become defensive and emotional. The "I" statement formula is straightforward and effective for expressing your feelings and needs clearly.**

**"I FEEL....**

What are my feelings?

**WHEN....**

Describe the other person's actions.

**BECAUSE...**

The effect of the behavior on you.

**I NEED."**

What would you like the other person to do instead?

# PREPARING FOR A DIFFICULT CONVERSATION

Before you jump into a difficult conversation, spend some private time to identify the difficulty and acknowledge different points of view.

- How do you see the situation?
- What assumptions are you making? What stories are you telling yourself?
- How might the other person perceive the same situation?
- What emotions is this problem stirring up for you?
- What is the impact of this situation on you and what hypothesis do you have about the other person's intention?

Be certain this is a conversation that is worth having.

- What is your purpose in addressing this issue/having this conversation?
- What will likely happen if you ignore this problem? How will you feel?
- How is this problem affecting the productivity and morale of your unit?

Invite the other person to talk with you. Emphasize your interest in working well together and hearing their point of view. A couple of sentences you might consider using are: "I would like to understand where you are coming from on ..." or "Can you say a little more about how you see things about ...?"

Start the conversation by "seeking first to understand." Ask the other person an open-ended question that will get him/her to describe how she sees the situation. Do your very best listening. Listen with empathy. Acknowledge the other person's feelings and point of view. Paraphrase to see if you got it right.

Share your own point of view, your intentions, and your feelings. Use "I" statements. Describe how you believe you got to where you are, including how you contributed to the problem. Take responsibility for your part.

Talk about the future and what can happen differently so you don't end up in the same place. Offer what you plan to do differently. Ask the person what suggestions they have to resolve the situation. Suggest what you think the other person could do.

Thank the other person for talking with you. Offer why it was important to resolve this conflict.

# PREPARING FOR A DIFFICULT CONVERSATION

STEP	WHAT WILL YOU SAY? WHAT WILL YOU DO?
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Be certain this is a problem that is worth addressing.	
Invite the other person to talk with you.	
Start the conversation by “seeking first to understand.”	
Share your own point of view, your intentions, and your feelings. Use “I” statements. Take responsibility for your part.	
Talk about the future and what can happen differently so you don’t end up in the same place.	
Thank the other person for talking with you.	