

Reach Out!

A Center Linking College and Community Mentors with Children and Teens

“Power of What I Say” Workshop Preview

Introduction

Most of us grew up with the jingle “sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me.” Well, that statement surely is a lie! All of us can remember with great accuracy critical, blaming, or judgmental words spoken to us a long time ago and even more recently.

“I” begins a shockingly high number of statements and utterances we speak each day. This should not be a surprise. As human beings, we are naturally quite self-centered. We need to pull back and examine our “I” statement patterns, habits, and motivations. Whenever we begin a statement with “I,” we need to take full responsibility for ourselves and what we are about to utter. Our culture tends to reinforce the notion that we can say anything we want to, to anyone we want to, and anytime we want to. In *Reach Out*, we have to consider the power, impact, and possible influence of our “I” statements on others. At the same time, we are wise to think about our “self talk.” What we say to and about ourselves has tremendous power to influence and impact our lives, relationships, and futures.

Concept of “I” Statements

An “I” statement shares what we want someone else to know about us.

Most of what “I” say relates to—

- Ideas – My notions, plans, inklings, impressions, thoughts
- Beliefs – My opinions, convictions, spiritual truths, religious tenets
- Information – My news, facts, data, observations
- Feelings – My emotions, personal reactions, sensitivities
- Meanings – My passions, intentions, aspirations, hopes, legacies, life purposes

Typically, “I” statements are focused on ourselves rather than edifying, complimenting, or learning more about someone else. There surely needs to be a balance of using “I” statements to express ourselves as well as to build others up.

Basic Considerations about “I” Statements

For mentoring partners, we ask that you consider whether or not you are thinking about the other person when sharing “I” statements. For example, we need to take into account the appropriateness of what we say to someone else. Am I considering his or her feelings? Am I trying to inappropriately sway, criticize, or influence the other person? Am I offering more information about me, my experience, or my feelings than is appropriate?

Non-Examples of Responsible “I” Statements

Listed below are a few examples of irresponsible and hurtful “I” statements.

- **Gossiping** shows our disrespect for another person. Gossip exposes our self-defeating attitudes about relationships in our lives. Gossip puts the person we are sharing it with in a very hard situation. Gossip is destructive.
- **Sarcasm** belittles another person. Sarcasm is destructive and prevents honest and caring communication. We are being aggressive when we are sarcastic.
- **Giving unwanted advice under the cloak of being honest** says that we think we know what is best for someone else. Beware of giving out inappropriate or unwanted advice and criticism.
- **Cold and angry silence** can be very hurtful and damaging for the other person. This behavior can be stated or unstated. We may say “I am not going to talk to you” or “I want you to leave me alone” or “I want you to go away.” Or we can be in the person’s proximity and our silence is one of these unspoken statements. We ignore him or her.

Examples of Positive “I” Statements

We hope that mentoring partners will learn a great deal about positive “I” statements.

- **Specific Praise** statements recognize the actual behaviors we appreciate in someone else. Authentic praise and recognition mean the world to us. Most of us have a good sensor for detecting fake or non-genuine praise. Be sincere.
- **“I” Messages** communicate what is troubling us or what is positively affecting us about another person’s behavior. “I” messages stand on the belief that others’ behaviors and choices do, indeed, impact and influence us in negative, neutral, and positive ways. People cannot read our minds! “I” messages are powerful and very effective to enable us to recognize and share our own feelings related to or spawned by another’s actions. These statements further permit us to share the impact or consequence of the behavior on us.

“I” messages have three main parts:

“I feel (mad, sad, bad, glad ...)

+ When you (specific behavior of the other person)

+ And it makes me (the consequence of person’s behavior on me).”

- **“I” Want Statements** clearly state the behavior you would like to see happen from someone else. These statements are requests of the other person. When we state an “I want” message, we are also required to listen, receive, and respect the other person’s decision about our request. Often these statements invite some compromise, too.

Conclusion

Our “I statements” possess great power and influence over others and ourselves.

What we speak to and over each other can seriously edify or harm the other person. No one is responsible for “I” messages but ourselves. We can lose self-confidence due to what we hear others say to or about us or from what we say to ourselves. We can embrace or dismiss passions, hopes, and dreams due to what we hear others say to or about us or from what we say to ourselves. We can feel inspired and worthy or desperate and doomed due to what we have heard spoken to or over us in our lives.

These tips may help you become more aware and responsible for what you say.

- Be clear and concise.
- Do not label or criticize someone else or yourself.
- Avoid sarcasm.
- Mean what you say and say what you mean.
- Be honest.
- Be forgiving to yourself and to others.
- Keep confidences.

A friend might help you recognize and reflect upon your common “I” statements.

Many also keep a journal to begin to grasp patterns and habits for “I” statements.

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Worksheet: "Power of What I Say"

Name: _____ Date: _____

Partner: _____

1. Specific Praise Statements

Think about something you really love and appreciate about someone else.
Write down a specific praise statement that you can say or write to him or her.

2. Gossip Statements

Who do you tend to gossip about?

Why are you choosing to gossip about that person or group?

How does your gossiping negatively impact you?

3. Self Talk

Complete some of these sentence starters:

"I think I am _____."

"I am passionate about _____."

"I am really good at _____."

"I want _____."

"I need _____."

"I hope _____."

Reflect and share with a partner what you are learning about the things you say to yourself. Ponder some new "self talk" messages you want to start telling yourself and believing about yourself.