

I Messages

Updated 7/12/01

A particularly good way to prevent escalation of arguments and avoid putting others on the defensive is to state feelings or directions in the form of an "I (not ) message". Restate the comments found below, avoiding any negative or even neutral use of the word "you". Tell how the behavior affects you by using "I", "me", "my" or some other self-referring designation.

What can you say in place of "you" when talking with kids (or a loved one with whom you're having an argument or to whom you will need to give a direction)? Instead of "you", perhaps respond with "my students." We can also bond and connect with our pupils by using the plural form of the "I message"...Instead of "You're all too noisy.", try "We all need to be quiet so that we can hear Toby's report."

Examples:

Notice how the word "you" was eliminated from the statements found below, replacing that word with "I", "us", "we", and "our".

"You weren't listening. You're gonna end up on welfare."
becomes "I want my students to listen closely so that they can learn important things that will help them succeed in life."

"If you use your garbage mouth one more time, you're losing recess."
becomes "I need to hear only appropriate words for the rest of the period. That way recess will still be on the schedule."

"You're a rude little bugger." becomes "I feel bad when my students speak in a mean way. Please tell me what you want in a polite way...that's the only way you'll ever get it. (knowing smile here)"

Notice how the utterances become less confrontational and condescending. Chances of getting compliance and cooperation increase. The wording can initially be a bit cumbersome, but becomes easier with practice. Let's all give a conscious effort toward improving our verbal directions to kids. (Notice how I avoided saying that "You need to improve your verbal commands.")

Your Turn

Imagine the situation in which these comments are said and provide an "I message" replacement.

"You're outta your chair again."

"What's wrong with you?"

"Oh no...What did you do that for?"

"Whoa! You're doing it all wrong."

"You little brat."

"You better start paying attention."

"You're living down to your reputation."

"Why do you always do this to yourself?"

"You ain't never gonna be no honors student nohow."

"You're doing it all wrong."

"You're so clumsy (noisy, rude, nosy, etc.)"

"Bozo! Quit acting like a clown."

"Bonzo and Cheetah. Stop acting like apes."

"Godzilla and King Kong, why are you always breaking things?"

"Don't deny it. You're the only one who opens those boxes Pandora."

Practice Makes Perfect

Write down "You" statements heard being used by yourself or others. Rephrase them into "I" or "We" messages.

For other effective ways to gain compliance while respectfully communicating with youngsters, see the home page link titled ["Nice things to try before you use 'do it or else' strategies"](#)



I would really appreciate it if someone would fetch Dr. Mac's Home Page



This is an "eye message". (But what does it mean?)