

Using 'I' Statements in Conversation

In all relationships, people are going to fall short. It is important to communicate your needs assertively to those around you. Using I-Statements allows you to take responsibility for your needs, thoughts and feelings.

Typically, I-Statements follow a **5-Step Formula**, which is broken down as follows:

1. **When you...**(state the specific action that bothered you).
2. **I feel...**(state your feelings in response to the action)
3. **What I think is happening is...**(give your version of events)
4. **I need/want/prefer...**(share your needs/what has to change)
5. **Would you/Can we...**(identify a specific action that would rectify the situation)

Below are some examples of using I-Statements to communicate your needs in an assertive manner.

Example 1: Talking in a Professional Context to a Coworker

Scenario: You work at an office and John is constantly taking the pens you bring from home and using them without asking. He also does not return the pens, which causes you to be short of pens when you need them for other tasks.

I-Statement: John, **when you** take my pens, **I feel** frustrated. **What I think is happening** is that you are having trouble finding pens to use around the office. **I would prefer** if you do not use my pens without asking me first. **Would you** make sure you ask me before you use my pens and return them as soon as you're done using them?

Example 2: Talking to a Partner

Scenario: Danielle is frustrated because her partner, Alejandro is very sensitive and constantly asks Danielle if she is mad at him when she does not respond in an outwardly cheerful manner.

I-Statement: Alejandro, **when you** ask if I'm mad at you, I get defensive because it **makes me feel like** I am doing something wrong. **What I think is happening is that** you are reading too much into my emotions from other things that happen throughout my day. **I need you** to trust that I would tell you if something you did was upsetting me. **Can we** work together and promise that we'll tell each other when we are mad, instead of just assuming?

Example 3: Talking to a Friend

Scenario: Jagmeet and Massimo have been friends for a while and their families are friends too. Both men get together for lunch every second Tuesday. However, Massimo is always late.

I-Statement: Massimo, **when you** are late for our weekly lunch, it **makes me feel** upset. **What I think is happening** is that you have too much going on that day and are having a hard time sticking to the time we set up. **I need you** to be on time for our engagements. **Can we** adjust the time or day so that it works better for both of us?

Activity

Think of a situation at home, school, work or in your social life where you could use I-Statements. Using the format we provided above, write the problem and break down how you could use an I-Statement to help address the problem.

Situation:

When you:

I feel:

What I think is happening is:

I need/want/prefer:

Would you/Can we:

Situation:

When you:

I feel:

What I think is happening is:

I need/want/prefer:

Would you/Can we:

Gabriella Lancia, PhD