

# Effective Talking

There are some situations when a parent needs to communicate their point of view directly! A technique for doing this effectively is "I" messages. "I" messages work well because they shift the emphasis off blaming the child (which they can argue about), to how the parent feels about the behaviour. "I" messages work best in a firm, but calm tone of voice so if necessary, give yourself some time to cool-off if you are angry. "I" messages work equally as well with children and adults.

## How to Deliver an "I" Message

### 1. Name the behaviour or situation you want changed.

Aim this statement at the behaviour, not the child or their personality. Start with "When you...."

*Example: "When you leave the kitchen in a mess...."*

### 2. Say how you feel about the situation.

People often believe the emotion they are feeling is anger. If they examine the emotion more closely they realize it is usually closer to something else like: fear, hurt, disrespect, worry etc. Start with "I feel...."

*Example: "I feel taken advantage of...."*

### 3. State your reason or the consequences to you.

Everyone wants a reason for changing their behaviour. Give your child a reason. Begin it with "because...."

*Example: "because then I have to spend my time and energy cleaning up after you."*

### 4. Say what you want done.

Be explicit. Start with "I would like...."

*Example: "I would like you to put the food away in the fridge and the dishes in the sink."*

### "I" Message Complete....

*"When you leave the kitchen in a mess, I feel taken advantage of because then I have to spend my time and energy cleaning up after you. I would like you to put the food away in the fridge and the dishes in the sink."*

### 5. Ask for agreement.

Follow your "I" message with a request for agreement and commitment.

*Example: "Will you put the food away in the fridge and the dishes in the sink when you make yourself something to eat in the kitchen?"*

## FAMILY-LIFE SKILLS

Other cards in this series:  
Conflict Resolution, The Family Council.

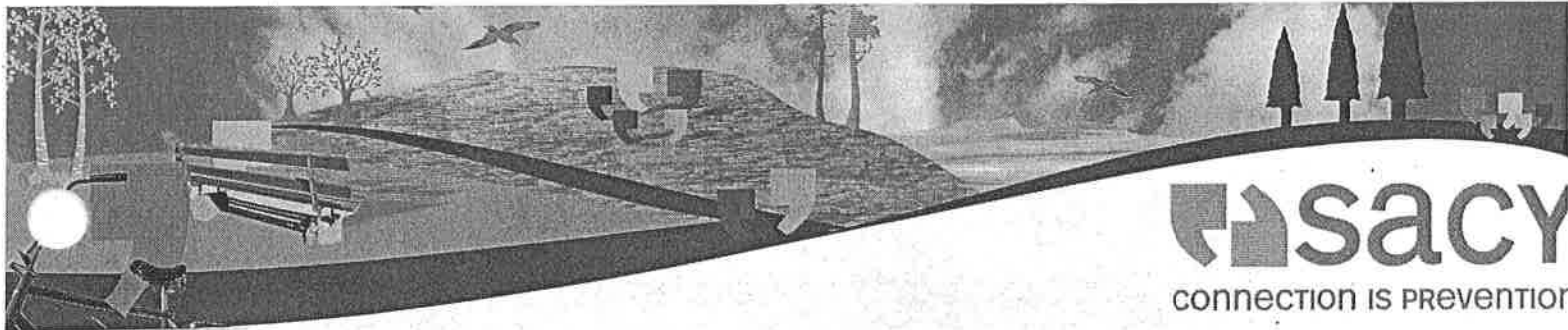
Written by: Carolyn M. Usher  
Published by: BC Council for Families  
#204-2590 Granville Street, Vancouver,  
B.C., Canada V6H 3H1  
(604) 660-0675 or 1-800-663-5638 (in B.C.)

ISBN 1-895342-91-0

Funding for the development of this publication was provided by the Ministry of Social Services, Province of B.C.

# Common Thinking Traps

Thinking Trap and Definition	Example
<b>Trap: Jumping to Conclusions</b> We predict what is going to happen, with little or no evidence. This can include thinking that you know what others are thinking (mind reading), without any evidence.	<i>I'm not going to the local new mom group because I won't fit in. Talking to other mothers will just highlight how little I know about being a mother.</i>
<b>Trap: Worst-Case Scenario</b> We exaggerate how badly something will turn out and how we will be unable to cope.	<i>I can't stop comparing my son to other children his age. If I find that he is developing slower, I worry that he'll always be behind and won't be successful in life ... and I won't know how to help him.</i>
<b>Trap: It's All My Fault</b> We take on too much responsibility and believe that if we have any influence over a negative outcome then we are responsible for preventing it.	<i>It must have been my fault that I ended up having an emergency C-section. There must have been SOMETHING I could have done to prevent it.</i>
<b>Trap: Harsh Critic</b> We impose harsh rules or labels on ourselves or others about the way we SHOULD behave and/or feel.	<i>I SHOULD always be able to soothe my child right away when she is upset. I'm a bad mother for not being able to do so.</i>
<b>Trap: Black-and-White Thinking</b> We think in extreme (or all-or-nothing) terms and view things as either perfect or a complete disaster or failure.	<i>My son's birth was a horrible experience and I feel like a failure. I had an epidural even though I planned not to have one.</i>
<b>Trap: Confusing Thoughts with Actual Probability</b> We believe that thinking about a negative event or action actually increases the likelihood of it happening.	<i>I get horrific images of my child catching some disease and being very ill. This is a sign that it's likely to happen and I need to be extra careful about cleanliness.</i>
<b>Trap: Confusing Thoughts with Actions</b> We believe having the thought about doing something undesirable is the same as actually doing it.	<i>Whenever I feel frustrated with my daughter, I get scary thoughts about hurting her. What if these thoughts are trying to warn me that I could snap sometime and actually do it? I try to spend as little alone time with her as I can to make sure that I do not act on my thoughts.</i>
<b>Trap: If It "Feels" True, It Must Be True</b> We use emotional reasoning – using our feelings as evidence that our thoughts are really true, even when there is little or no concrete evidence to support them.	<i>I feel unsure of myself, therefore I must not know what I'm doing as a mother.</i>



## Resources for families of teens

### Understanding Teen Development:

- [www.teenmentalhealth.org](http://www.teenmentalhealth.org) teen brain, development, sleep, behaviour and parenting
- Book: *Brainstorm: Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain*, by Daniel J. Siegel, M.D.
- CBC: David Suzuki's The Nature of Things: Surviving the Teen Brain  
<http://www.cbc.ca/player/Shows/Shows/The+Nature+of+Things/2011-12/ID/2188547727/>

### Mental health resources and supports:

- [www.heretohelp.bc.ca](http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca) mental health, substance fact sheets, tips & links to excellent Canadian sites
- [www.mindcheck.ca](http://www.mindcheck.ca) practical activities and articles for youth and adults.
- [www.keltymentalhealth.ca](http://www.keltymentalhealth.ca) BC's Mental Health Resource Centre offering support from professionals, parent peer support, educational events, resources and information & links to excellent Canadian sites

### Substances, Society, and Interactive Resources:

- [www.xperiment.ca](http://www.xperiment.ca) Interactive games, videos and info from Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse
- [www.camh.ca](http://www.camh.ca) Centre for Addiction & Mental Health. Evidence-based resources and information
- [www.drugcocktail.ca](http://www.drugcocktail.ca) Look up interactions associated with alcohol, cannabis & 200 drug combinations

### Online Safety, Gaming, Social Media, and Resources:

- [www.cybertip.ca](http://www.cybertip.ca) includes a guide on Self/peer exploitation for families
- [www.thedoorthatsnotlocked.ca](http://www.thedoorthatsnotlocked.ca) quizzes, games, guidelines for families
- [www.netsmartz.org](http://www.netsmartz.org) safety, online friends, what your profile says about you, friend or fake, etc.

### Books:

#### **Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain** *Daniel J. Siegel, M.D.*

"By the end of this book, the teenager has been transformed...into a thinking, feeling, and entirely approachable human being."

#### **Smart but Scattered Teens: executive skills program for helping teens executive function**

*Richard Guare, Ph.D., Peg Dawson, Ph.D., Colin Guare*

"This positive guide provides a science-based program for promoting teens' independence ..."

#### **Hold On To Your Kids (Why Parents Need to Matter More Than Peers)** *Gordon Neufeld, Ph.D. and Gabor Maté, M.D.*

"With original insights on parent-child attachments and how parents can restore them, this is a book for vitalizing families..."

# "I" Statements

When a person feels that they are being blamed—whether rightly or wrongly—it's common that they respond with defensiveness. "I" statements are a simple way of speaking that will help you avoid this trap by reducing feelings of blame. A good "I" statement takes responsibility for one's own feelings, while tactfully describing a problem.

"I feel *emotion word* when *explanation*."

- ✓ "I feel..." must be followed with an emotion word, such as "angry", "hurt", or "worried".
- ✓ Careful wording won't help if your voice still sounds blaming. Use a soft and even tone.
- ✓ In your explanation, gently describe how the other person's actions affect you.

## Examples

<b>Blaming</b>	"You can't keep coming home so late! It's so inconsiderate."
<b>"I" Statement</b>	"I feel worried when you come home late. I can't even sleep."

<b>Blaming</b>	"You never call me. I guess we just won't talk anymore."
<b>"I" Statement</b>	"I feel hurt when you go so long without calling. I'm afraid you don't care."

## Practice

<b>Scenario</b>	A friend always cancels plans at the last minute. Recently, you were waiting for them at a restaurant, when they called to say they couldn't make it.
<b>"I" Statement</b>	

<b>Scenario</b>	You are working on a group project, and one member is not completing their portion. You have repeatedly had to finish their work.
<b>"I" Statement</b>	

<b>Scenario</b>	Your boss keeps dumping new work on you, with little instruction, and not enough time. Despite working overtime, you're weeks behind.
<b>"I" Statement</b>	

# Reflections

## Communication Skill

Using a technique called **reflection** can quickly help you become a better listener. When reflecting, you will repeat back what someone has just said to you, but in your own words. This shows that you didn't just hear the other person, but you are trying to understand them.

Reflecting what another person says can feel funny at first. You might think the other person will be annoyed at you for repeating them. However, when used correctly, reflections receive a positive reaction and drive a conversation forward. **Here's an example:**

**Speaker:** "I get so angry when you spend so much money without telling me. We're trying to save for a house!"

**Listener:** "We're working hard to save for a house, so it's really frustrating when it seems like I don't care."

### ✓ Quick Tips

The tone of voice you use for reflections is important. Use a tone that comes across as a statement, with a bit of uncertainty. Your goal is to express: "I think this is what you're telling me, but correct me if I'm wrong." Your reflections don't have to be perfect. If the other person corrects you, that's good! Now you have a better understanding of what they're trying to say.

Try to reflect emotions, even if the person you're listening to didn't clearly describe them. You may be able to pick up on how they feel by their tone of voice or body language.

Switch up your phrasing, or your reflections *will* start to sound forced. Try some of these:

- "I hear you saying that..."
- "It sounds like you feel..."
- "You're telling me that..."

Focus on reflecting the main point. Don't worry too much about all the little details, especially if the speaker had a lot to say!

# Relationship Conflict Resolution

## **Focus on the problem, not the person.**

When a disagreement turns to personal insults, raised voices, or mocking tones, the conversation is no longer productive. Be careful to focus on the problem without placing blame on your partner. If a disagreement becomes personal, you should pause the conversation.

## **Use reflective listening.**

Oftentimes during arguments we focus on getting our own point across rather than listening to our partner. Before responding to your partner, restate what they have said to you in your own words. Continue this process until your partner agrees that you understand. Next, share your side. Your partner should reflect back your ideas in their own words until they too understand. Using this technique will help both individuals feel listened to and understood, even if you disagree.

## **Use "I" statements.**

When sharing a concern, begin your sentence with "I". For example: "I feel hurt when you don't tell me you'll be late". With this sentence format we show that we are taking responsibility for our own emotion rather than blaming our partner. The alternative sentence—"You never tell me when you're going to be late"—will often cause a partner to become defensive.

## **Know when to take a time-out.**

When you and your partner are becoming argumentative, insulting, or aggressive, it's a good idea to take a time-out. Have a plan in place so you or your partner can call for a break when needed. Spend some time doing something alone that you find relaxing. When you've both calmed down, you and your partner can return to solving the problem. Be sure that you do return—it isn't a good idea to leave these issues unaddressed.

## **Work toward a resolution.**

Disagreement is a normal part of a relationship. If it becomes clear that you and your partner will not agree, focus on a resolution instead. Try to find a compromise that benefits both individuals. Ask yourself if this disagreement really matters to your relationship, and let yourself move on if not.

# Fair Fighting Rules

## **Before you begin, ask yourself why you feel upset.**

Are you truly angry because your partner left the mustard on the counter? Or are you upset because you feel like you're doing an uneven share of the housework, and this is just one more piece of evidence? Take time to think about your own feelings before starting an argument.

## **Discuss one issue at a time.**

"You shouldn't be spending so much money without talking to me" can quickly turn into "You don't care about our family". Now you need to resolve two problems instead of one. Plus, when an argument starts to get off topic, it can easily become about everything a person has ever done wrong. We've all done a lot wrong, so this can be especially cumbersome.

## **No degrading language.**

Discuss the issue, not the person. No put-downs, swearing, or name-calling. Degrading language is an attempt to express negative feelings while making sure your partner feels just as bad. This will just lead to more character attacks while the original issue is forgotten.

## **Express your feelings with words and take responsibility for them.**

"I feel angry." "I feel hurt when you ignore my phone calls." "I feel scared when you yell." These are good ways to express how you feel. Starting with "I" is a good technique to help you take responsibility for your feelings (no, you can't say whatever you want as long as it starts with "I").

## **Take turns talking.**

This can be tough, but be careful not to interrupt. If this rule is difficult to follow, try setting a timer allowing 1 minute for each person to speak without interruption. Don't spend your partner's minute thinking about what you want to say. Listen!

## **No stonewalling.**

Sometimes, the easiest way to respond to an argument is to retreat into your shell and refuse to speak. This refusal to communicate is called stonewalling. You might feel better temporarily, but the original issue will remain unresolved and your partner will feel more upset. If you absolutely cannot go on, tell your partner you need to take a time-out. Agree to resume the discussion later.

## **No yelling.**

Sometimes arguments are "won" by being the loudest, but the problem only gets worse.

## **Take a time-out if things get too heated.**

In a perfect world we would all follow these rules 100% of the time, but it just doesn't work like that. If an argument starts to become personal or heated, take a time-out. Agree on a time to come back and discuss the problem after everyone has cooled down.

## **Attempt to come to a compromise or an understanding.**

There isn't always a perfect answer to an argument. Life is just too messy for that. Do your best to come to a compromise (this will mean some give and take from both sides). If you can't come to a compromise, merely understanding can help soothe negative feelings.

