

I Statements Learning Experiences 25

[Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)

Grade Level Range: Middle School - Adult

To Teachers:

If you have not already done so, please review the:

1. Introduction to Teaching Healthy Relationships and Relationship Skills ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)) for suggestions on teaching social-emotional skills, processing learning experiences, applying skills in real-life situations, and assessing, evaluating, and grading SES.
2. I Statement Reading ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)) and I Statements Skill Card. ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#))

If you have not already taught students how to role-play, observe, coach, and give feedback, see the Role Playing, Coaching, Observing, & Giving Feedback Reading & Process ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)) for detailed information on how to set up and teach role-playing that uses students as coaches and observers (who provide feedback). In addition, see the Observing & Giving Feedback Skill Card ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)).

The purpose of these learning experiences is to provide multiple opportunities for students to become skillful in using “I Statements. Skillfully using “I Statements” is essential for working through misunderstandings, minor conflicts, and more significant interpersonal conflicts. See the [Conflict Resolution Skills Module](#) for readings and learning experiences on working through more significant interpersonal conflicts.

Materials/Readings/Skill Cards Needed For This Learning Experience

1. I Statements Reading ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#))
2. I Statements Skill Card ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#))
3. I Statements Observation Form ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#))
4. Observing & Giving Feedback Skill Card ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#))
5. In addition, see How To Teach SES Skills in the [How To Teach Social-Emotional Skills Module](#) for additional information about the importance of using student observers and coaches and the importance of processing after role-playing.

Procedure/Directions For Teaching “I Statements”

1. Ask your students to think about a time when they were having a conflict with a peer and didn't initiate a conversation about the conflict with them.
 - Why didn't you initiate the conversation?
 - How did you feel after not initiating a conversation?
 - How did you feel about yourself, the other person, and the relationship as a result?
 - What impact did not sharing have on you and the relationship?
 - Ask volunteers to share.
2. Brainstorm a list of all the reasons people might avoid initiating a conversation with a friend when they are having a conflict. See the examples below.
3. Brainstorm a list of all the potential problems with keeping things in and not addressing conflicts. See the examples below.

Why We Don't Initiate Conversations About Conflicts

1. Lack of trust
2. Unwillingness to self-disclose
3. Fear of rejection
4. Fear of making the situation worse
5. In the past, the other person has communicated that they are not receptive to listening to you and/or resolving a conflict with you.
6. There is a power difference, and the other person has communicated in the past that they are not receptive to resolving conflicts.
7. We fear discovering things about ourselves, such as our contributions to the conflict or other things about ourselves, that we don't want to know or acknowledge.
8. Fear of finding things out about the relationship we don't want to know or acknowledge.
9. Our style of conflict resolution is to deny it, accommodate the other person, or withdraw.
10. The belief that our feelings and needs aren't important or the other person's feelings and needs are more important than ours.
11. Most people don't like conflict, but if there is one, no amount of denying it will make it go away.
12. Not knowing how to bring it up in a constructive way that will make the person want to listen to us, understand us, consider what we have to say, and possibly change their behavior to help us meet our needs. Not having the skills.

The Problem With Keeping Things In and Not Addressing the Conflict

1. Nothing changes. The conflict is still there.
2. We use excessive energy to keep our feelings down.
3. We cannot keep things in; they come out in other ways about other issues (usually smaller ones), or we go off on them.
4. We assume others know how we feel, but they don't because we have not told them. They are not mind readers.
5. We resent the other person. If something bothers me about you (I feel disappointed, hurt, frustrated, etc.) because of something you have done or not done, then there is a conflict in the relationship. If I don't initiate a conversation with you, I will keep information about the relationship to myself that you don't know about. I am being dishonest because I am not sharing my feelings with you, and I am not giving you an opportunity to change. How can you change if I have not told you how I feel and what is happening? Over time, I may resent you, which is unfair because you don't know what is happening. I am not telling you; I am giving you a chance to change. Resentment eats away at the relationship, and I may start pulling away and/or start being short with you about minor issues.

Next, ask them how they feel when people do and say the following to them:

1. Judge. Say something like, "You are rude."
2. Preach. Say that you should do something or that you shouldn't do that.
3. Put You Down. Say something like, "You are a bad friend".
4. Criticize. Say that you never do anything right.
5. Giving You Unsolicited Solutions. Say something like why don't you do that.
6. Threaten You. Say something like if you don't... then I will...
7. Asking Why in a Hostile and Judgmental Tone. Say something like why did you do that or why are you...?

Now ask them the following questions: If someone does or says any of the above to you, how likely are you to want to:

1. Listen to them
2. Understand them
3. Consider what they have to say
4. Change your behavior to meet their needs

Point out that judging, preaching, putting someone down, criticizing, giving unsolicited solutions, threatening someone, or asking why in a hostile and judgmental tone are all examples of “You Statements,” a form of aggressive communication. “You Statements” usually make people feel attacked, criticized, blamed, and defensive. When people feel defensive, they are more likely to attack, and they are less likely to listen, try to understand, suspend their reaction, consider what we are saying, and change their behavior to help us meet our needs. “You Statements” more than likely create a feeling of hostility, which tends to escalate conflicts, or the other person shuts down or tunes out, which stifles communication and problem-solving.

Summarize By Making The Following Points:

People involved in close relationships will have misunderstandings, conflicts, and reach impasses, all of which are normal. When there is a conflict or a misunderstanding we can say or do nothing and keep our feelings to ourselves, we can react and say things, usually without thinking (e.g. “You Statements”) that makes the situation worse, or we can communicate what we are feeling and why and what our needs are in the situations. Relationships usually become worse and sometimes end when people don’t attempt to work through misunderstandings, problems, and conflicts or when they aren’t able to resolve them satisfactorily. If we hide how we are feeling, our concealment can sicken the relationship. The energy we pour into hiding adds to the stress of the relationship and dulls our awareness of how we feel. Keeping a conflict to ourselves is not a healthy option.

When trying to work through a misunderstanding or conflict or when trying to get our needs met in relationships, it is essential to communicate assertively. To communicate assertively (vs. passively or aggressively) we must be self-aware. We need to know and accept what we are feeling and thinking and why, be aware of our values and needs, and accept that our feelings about relationships are valid. It is also important to believe that we have a right to our feelings, needs, thoughts, values, and perspectives and that we have the right to stand up for ourselves, to not be taken advantage of, to ask for what we want and need, and to express ourself openly and honestly in a respectful manner. Being assertive does that.

When communicating, we can be passive, aggressive, or assertive. When we are passive in our communication, we disregard our feelings, needs, values, and opinions or believe they are less important than the other person’s. We may keep our feelings and needs to ourselves, or if we communicate them, we do so passively by averting our gaze or looking down and/or communicating with hesitancy or self-dismissal in our voice. Passive communication shows a lack of respect for oneself and gives up control to the other person, thus making it difficult, if not impossible, for our needs to be met.

Aggressive communication is characterized by nonverbal behaviors such as fist-clenching, scowling, crossing one's arms, being sarcastic, condescending, blaming, shouting, threatening, or using put-downs. Aggressive communication is controlling and possibly manipulative, showing a lack of respect for the other person. When people are aggressive in their communication, they are also less likely to have their needs met unless that other person is intimidated and does so only out of fear. Being aggressive usually harms the relationship. "You Statements" are an example of aggressive communication.

Assertive communication is a way to communicate our needs and feelings nonjudgmentally (and why). Being assertive demonstrates self-respect and respect for your and the other person's feelings and needs. Being assertive increases our chances of getting our needs met, increases the chances of effectively and satisfactorily working through misunderstandings and conflicts, and usually strengthens relationships.

"I Statements" are a way to assertively communicate what we are feeling and thinking and why, as well as our perspectives, values, and needs in a relationship. They do so in a non-judgmental way without assigning blame. Using "I Statements" increases the chances that others will want to listen to us, try to understand us, suspend their reaction, consider what we are saying, and possibly change their behavior to help us meet our needs. When two people can communicate effectively and satisfactorily work through misunderstandings and conflicts, their relationship becomes stronger.

"I Statements" avoid being critical, judgmental, threatening, or angrily asking why. "I Statements" nonjudgmentally communicate how we feel, why we feel this way, and our needs in this and future situations. We are not saying that we are right or that they are wrong or bad; we are saying how we feel, our needs, and why and how we would like them to be in the future. We are telling them the impact their behavior has on us. The other person has a choice of how they want to behave in the future. People who care about us will usually consider what we say if we communicate clearly and effectively. "I Statements" communicate clearly and nonjudgmentally.

Being Late Situation:

Read the following Being Late Situation and tell your students to put themselves in this situation:

You have a friend who is chronically late. Whenever you agree to meet up with this friend at a time you both agreed to, they are always 10-20 minutes late. It doesn't matter if they are coming over to your house or you are meeting them somewhere in public. You feel frustrated and stressed out because it is important to you to be on time when meeting up with other friends, and you hate to feel rushed. In addition, if you are going to a movie, you hate to walk in late and/or get a bad seat. You have not spoken with your friend about this, so they have no idea how you feel and that being on time is important to you. In addition, you remember reading something about people having different concepts of time. Some people believe that meeting at 7 PM means meeting promptly at 7 PM, whereas others believe it means around 7 PM, so meeting 10 or 20 minutes later is actually on time for them. Part of you wants to talk with your friend about this, but part doesn't want to bring it up. You think you may be able to live with your frustration and stress about this. You try to rationalize that it's no big deal, and you tell yourself you shouldn't feel this way and get over it.

Use of the “I Statements” Skill Card

1. Distribute the I Statements” Skill Card ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)). Discuss and model the use of I Statements and the nonverbal behaviors.
2. Next, ask them to develop a complete “I Statement” for the Being Late Situation. Ask for volunteers to share their “I Statement” response with you. An example of a complete “I Statement” for the Being Late Situation would be: “When you are late when we have both agreed to meet up at a specific time I feel frustrated and stressed out because I worry that we will be late meeting up with friends or late to wherever we are going. Being late stresses me out. In the future, I would appreciate it if you would be on time. Are you willing to do that?”
3. Summarize by pointing out that if you said this to a friend, you would avoid being critical, judgmental, threatening, criticizing, giving solutions, or angrily asking why. You are nonjudgmentally telling your friend how you feel, why you feel this way, and what your needs are in this and future situations. You are not saying that you are right or that they are wrong or bad; you are just saying this is how you feel, what your needs are, and why and how you would like them to be in the future. You are telling your friend the impact their behavior has on them. Your friend then has a choice of how they want to behave in the future. People who care about us will usually consider what we say if we communicate clearly and effectively. “I Statements” do that. Since most people want to please the people they care about, hopefully, they will change their behavior in the future if it is not too difficult to do so. In this case, it would be easy for your friend to make every effort to be on time now that they know how important it is to you.
4. Next, point out that “I Statements” also avoid saying things that make people feel defensive and/or attacked. When we feel defensive and/or attacked, we are less likely to want to listen to someone, try to understand them, or consider what they are saying, and we are even less likely to change our behavior to help them meet their needs. One way we do that is by using “You Statements”. Review the “You Statements” examples on the “I Statements Skill Card and ask them how they feel when they are preached to, put down, criticized, given unsolicited solutions, threatened, or asked why in a hostile manner.

Procedure/Directions For Role Playing, Coaching, Observing, & Giving Feedback

1. Distribute copies of the I Statements Observation Form ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)) and the Observing & Giving Feedback Skill Card ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#))
2. Review the skills and demonstrate how to use them.
3. Explain that they will be working in groups and have the opportunity to role-play being assertive, being a coach, an observer, as well as have the chance to give feedback on what they observed.
4. Review the process for completing the observation form and the process for giving feedback on the Observing & Giving Feedback Skill Card ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)). Demonstrate how to provide feedback.
5. Divide the class into groups of 4. Have them select the best responses to the “Being Late Situation.” Ask several groups to volunteer to role-play the person being assertive with you. The group chooses one person to role-play while the other group members sit next to the person being assertive to coach them. If and only if the assertive person gets stuck, another group member can offer suggestions. All role-playing students should use their copy of the I Statements Skill Card ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)) to help them apply the skill successfully. While the assertive student is role-playing with you, the rest of the class observes using the “I Statements” Observation Form ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#))
6. After each role-play, ask an observer to volunteer to provide feedback using the process outlined on the Observing & Giving Feedback Skill Card ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)). This includes asking the assertive person what they did well and what they need to do better next time. Provide feedback to the observer regarding how well they provided feedback.
7. Have several groups repeat this process.

Role Playing The Skills In Small Groups

1. Provide them (one at a time) with the role-playing situations below. Select those that are developmentally appropriate for your students. It is suggested that you also develop situations, and you may also ask students to generate situations.
2. Have each group agree on how they will respond to the situation. It may be helpful to have them write out their responses.
3. After they develop each response, they take turns role-playing in their groups. One person will be role-playing the assertive person, a second person will be the recipient of the assertive response, the third person will observe and complete the Observation Form, and the fourth person will coach the person who is role-playing if and only if they get stuck. The coach's primary role is to note what worked well, what didn't, and what, if anything, they would have done differently.
4. Each group member will have the opportunity to play the role of the person being assertive, the person receiving the assertive response, and to be an observer and a coach.
5. All role-playing students should use their copy of the "I Statement" Skill Card ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)) to help them use the skill successfully.
6. The observer completes the Observation Form ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)) for the person being assertive.
7. After each role-play, the observer provides feedback using the process outlined on the Observing & Giving Feedback Skill Card ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)) to help them use the skill successfully. including asking the person what they did well and what they need to do better next time.
8. The observer should also ask the person receiving the assertive response how likely they would be to do what was being asked in the future and why.
9. Next, they are to switch roles, with the assertive student now receiving the assertive response, and the observer and coach switching roles.
10. After each role-play, repeat the process of the observer providing feedback, asking what they did well and what they need to do to improve, and asking the person receiving the assertive response how likely they would be to do what was being asked in the future and why.
11. While small groups are role-playing, you can circulate to gather information about students' competency. When walking around, you can intervene to improve effectiveness, correct misunderstandings and misconceptions about the skill use, and reinforce the appropriate and competent use of the skills. You will need to decide whether to intervene with a specific group or wait and process with the entire class. The information you gather will help you determine if you need to reteach and role-play how to use the skill or whether a simple reminder will suffice.

After each group has completed all the role plays, bring the whole class back to process.

Questions include:

1. What parts of an “I Statement” did you use effectively, and what skills do you need to improve or do more consistently?
2. Which parts of an “I Statement” were easiest and why?
3. What parts of an “I Statement” were the most difficult and why?
4. What parts of an “I Statement” will be easiest to use in real life and why?
5. What parts of an “I Statement” will you have the most difficulty with when you use them in real life and why?
6. What was it like to give feedback?
7. What was it like to receive feedback?
8. Was it easier or more challenging to give feedback or receive it? Why?
9. What would make it easier to receive feedback?
10. What would make it easier to give feedback?

Role Play Situations

Put yourself in the following situations. Imagine how you or most people would feel. Develop an appropriate and effective “I Statement” and write it as you would say it to the person.

1. Your brother/sister keeps borrowing things from you without asking.
2. A friend says they will Facetime with you at a specific time, and they don't. They have been doing this more and more often.
3. A friend borrows your class notes to study for a test. They say they will return them tomorrow in school. The next day, on your way home, you realize that your friend didn't return your notes and that you need them to study for tomorrow's big test. Your friend has a history of not returning things on time.
4. A friend keeps jokingly making fun of your clothes.
5. A close friend has not spent as much time with you as you would like.
6. Your close friend told another friend something about you that you had asked them not to share with anyone.

7. One of your friends tells inappropriate jokes that make you uncomfortable, leaving you tense and uneasy. Some of your other friends seem to laugh nervously or laugh the jokes off.
8. Your sibling is hanging out with people you don't like, and you think they will get them in trouble.
9. Whenever you fight with your sibling, it seems your parent doesn't listen to your side and is always siding with your sibling.
10. You need a book for a school assignment on Monday for a group project you are doing. If you don't have it by Monday, you will let your group down, and your grade will suffer. Your parents have told you all week that they will take you to get it, but they keep putting you off. It's Saturday, and you decide to talk with your parents.
11. Your parent makes you be home at 10 PM on weekends. Your close friend is having a big party next weekend and you would like to stay out until midnight.
12. On the days when you don't have a planned activity (sport, club, music, etc.) after school, your parents want you to come home and do your homework before doing anything else. You need to unwind after school and want the freedom to play video games, Facetime with friends, stream shows, etc., before doing homework. You also believe you would be more productive if you could plan your schedule.
13. Your parent wants you to make your bed before leaving for school in the morning. You feel rushed as it is in the morning. You are willing to make your bed before they come home from work.
14. You are frustrated trying to complete a big school project. You have been working hard on the project but have been unable to get all the necessary resources to complete it. It is due in a few days, and you don't see how you can finish it in time. The teacher told the class that points would be taken off every day if it was late.
15. In one of your classes, you are having trouble seeing the board. You are sitting near the back of the class because your teacher has required seating.

Student-Identified Situations

Have students identify misunderstandings and minor conflicts with siblings, parents, and friends. Have them define the conflict and develop effective and appropriate "I Statements" for each one.

What If They Are Unwilling To Do What I Am Asking?

If they are unwilling to do what you are asking, the best thing would be to use another “I Statement” and let them know how you feel about the fact that they are unwilling to go along with what you are asking. More than likely, you feel disappointed, hurt, or frustrated. Become aware of what you are feeling and share that. For example: “I feel disappointed that you are unwilling to... I was hoping you would do that for me.” Then, end the conversation. Don’t act out of anger, attack the person, blame them, or use a “You Statement”. It may be that the person is feeling defensive, which is why they are not agreeing. If you end the conversation without reacting out of anger, blaming them, or using a “You Statement,” it may be that later they will think about and consider what you said and come around to your way of thinking and change their behavior. Some people take longer to process things. If you react out of anger, blame them, or use a “You Statement” because they didn’t agree, there is little likelihood that they will consider what you have asked and thus change their behavior.

What If An “I Statement” Is Not Enough Because The Conflict Is Larger

It is possible that the conflict is more significant than you initially thought. A single “I Statement” is best for misunderstandings and minor conflicts. A more complex conflict that requires a negotiated resolution requires more sophisticated skills. See the [Conflict Resolution Skills Module](#). However, being skillful in using “I Statements”, asking genuine inquiry questions, being an effective passive and active listener, and avoiding the use of “You Statements” are all essential skills needed to resolve complex interpersonal conflicts.

Recommended Follow-Up

Even if you can spend multiple classes on “I Statements”, students will need more time using these skills to become proficient. It is suggested that the beginning and ending minutes be used throughout the year to practice these skills. Examples of how to use several minutes at the beginning or end of class include:

1. Have students pair up with a person sitting next to them. Read a situation and have each group develop an “I Statement” response. Ask for volunteers or randomly call on students to role-play with you.
2. Periodically, have students pair up and share a recent misunderstanding or small conflict they were involved in or observed. Have them develop an effective and appropriate “I Statement” for that situation. Ask for volunteers or randomly call on students to share the misunderstanding/small conflict and the “I Statement” they developed.
3. Share a misunderstanding or small conflict you were involved in or observed, and have students develop an effective and appropriate “I Statement” for that situation. Ask for volunteers or randomly call on students to share their “I Statement.”
4. If you have a pleasant feeling because of something a student or students have done, share that with them. For example, if you feel proud because of something they did, you could say: “When you...I felt proud.”

5. Whenever you are frustrated, annoyed, or have other strong feelings because of something your students have done or have not done, use an “I Statement” with them. For example: “I am feeling frustrated that so many of you are talking when someone else is talking. I would appreciate it if only one person talked at a time and if we all listened to them.” If you say it to one student versus the entire class, you could also add: “Are you willing to do that?” The more you can model using “I Statements,” the better.
6. See the Assertively Saying No readings and learning experiences for lessons on assertively saying no.

Follow-Up Learning Experiences: Applying “I Statements” In Real Life Situations

It is not enough to have students only use skills in class. They must be given opportunities to apply skills in real life outside of class. Using skills in real-life situations, processing the results, and modifying their response is necessary and must be continuous and ongoing.

Students develop a goal to use “I Statements” in their life outside the classroom using the My Goals Log LE and the My Goals Log ([SES Projects Module](#)). Using the My Goals Log allows students to change their behavior and develop goals that do not require much analysis or the exploration of alternatives and choices. The My Goals Log can be used to have students develop goals and evaluate their success at the midpoint and again at the end of the project.

Have students develop and implement the I Statements Project ([SES Projects Module](#)). The purpose of this project is to facilitate the development of competency in using “I Statements” in real-life situations. It is a more extensive project than the My Goals LE. It requires students to monitor their progress over time using self-monitoring charts and self-assess their effort, progress, and/or the extent to which they completed the project.

The Parent Communication Project was developed to provide students with that opportunity to use the skills of active and passive listening, asking genuine inquiry questions, and I Statements daily with a parent for several weeks. See the [Parent Communication Project Module](#)

Assessing & Grading The Use of I Statements

Assessing students’ ability to use “I Statements” is one of the easier social-emotional skills to determine. A test or quiz can be given by reading (or providing written) statements and having students write their I Statements responses. For example, you could read or provide the “Being Late Situation.”. Using the Likert Scale below, points are given for each correct response. Depending on your class size, you could call students up individually while the class works in groups, read a situation, and then use the Likert Scale below to assess their response.

See the [Assessment & Grading Module](#) for additional information on assessing and grading SES. This module also provides additional examples of generic rubrics and Likert Scales.

I Statements Likert Scale

How Effective Were They?

1. How effective were they at avoiding “You” statements?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Not Effective Somewhat Effective Very Effective

2. How effective were they at using the pronoun “I”?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Not Effective Somewhat Effective Very Effective

3. How effective were they at sharing what they were feeling?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Not Effective Somewhat Effective Very Effective

4. How effective were they at sharing why they felt this way?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Not Effective Somewhat Effective Very Effective

5. How effective were they at stating how they would like the person to be in the future (an “I Appreciate It Statement”)?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Not Effective Somewhat Effective Very Effective

6. How effective were they at asking them if they are willing to do what they are asking in the future (an “Are You Willing to Do It?” statement)?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Not Effective Somewhat Effective Very Effective

7. Overall, how effective were they at using an “I Statement” to share their feelings, why they felt this way, and their needs in the future?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Not Effective Somewhat Effective Very Effective