

## SAFEGUARDING

### Talking Techniques

As you talk to your child, you should try to make it a positive dialogue, rather than impose judgment or place blame. That usually means choosing "I" messages rather than "you" messages, especially when attempting to change or encourage certain behavior.

"I" messages are statements like "I have trouble finding things on my desk when it hasn't been straightened up by the last person who used it." "I need more quiet when I am trying to read." "Since I am so tired, I would like some help cleaning up the dinner dishes."

These "I" statements communicate the effect of a child's behaviour or actions upon the parent. But they are less threatening to a child than "you" messages, even though they still convey an honest feeling or message. They also communicate just how a child's behaviour affects her parents and encourage her to take responsibility for straightening up Dad's desk or helping clean up the kitchen. They communicate trust showing the parents' willingness to express their own feelings and their belief that their child will respond in a positive, responsible way.

By contrast, "you" messages are statements like "You should never do that." "You make me so angry." "Why don't you pay attention?" These messages are more child-focused and are more likely to create a struggle between you and your youngster, put a child on the defensive, encourage personal counter arguments, and discourage effective communication.

Even worse are the "put-down" messages that judge or criticise a youngster. They might involve name-calling, ridiculing, or embarrassing the child. These messages can have a serious negative impact on the youngster and on their self-esteem. If you communicate the message that your child is bad, stupid, inconsiderate, a disappointment, or a failure, that is how she is likely to perceive themselves, not only during their childhood but for many years thereafter (we all probably remember a particular time in our childhood).

With "I" statements, however, children do get the message in a more positive light. They often say things like "I didn't realise that the noise I was making was bothering you." Or "I'm glad you told me you were so tired. I'll help you with an extra chore or two." Children often readily assume more responsible roles if they are made aware of the situation and the feelings and needs of others, and are not "put down" in the process.

"I" messages you are not guaranteed success. Children may disregard the message, particularly when you first begin to make use of "I" statements. If this happens, repeat your "I" message, maybe saying it in a different way and with greater intensity. Be willing to say something like "This is how I feel, and I do not appreciate having my feelings ignored."

If you have consistently shown yourself to be receptive to and respectful of your child's feelings and thoughts, they will probably be more responsive to your own "I" statements. Give it some time.

As you communicate with your child, be sensitive to your tone of voice. It should be consistent with your message. Do not let your emotions confuse the message you are trying to convey.

Be as consistent as possible with all your children. You should have the same communication approach and style with every child, although the unique aspects of each relationship and each child's temperament may require some modifications. Do not appear to play favourites or be more accepting of one youngster than another.

Working together to keep our children safe and happy.

*Halina Rooney*

Deputy Head of Inclusion/SENCo