

Converting "You" Messages to "I" Messages

One of the most effective ways to keep communication open is by avoiding "You" messages and instead using "I" messages. "You" messages tend to put the other person on the defensive, making that person feel accused, guilty, or to blame for an unpleasant situation. "I" messages, however, share what's happening inside of the speaker without presuming to know the intentions or feelings of the other person. "I" messages are helpful in working through a sensitive issue. "You" messages are too often communication blockers.

Below are three examples of translating "You" messages into "I" messages. Then, there are six more "You" statements for you and your partner to convert yourselves, and then compare and discuss your responses with each other.

- "You" message: You drive entirely too fast.
"I" message: I get frightened when you drive so fast. Would you please slow down?
- "You" message: Can't you ever remember to wipe your feet?
"I" message: I feel unappreciated when I have just mopped the floor and then I see muddy footprints.
- "You" message: You never stay home any more.
"I" message: I am lonely when you are gone so much in the evening. I feel at the bottom of your of priorities when you are gone so often.
- "You" message: You make me mad when you walk away when I'm talking.
"I" message: I feel hurt when I am trying to talk and you walk away.
- "You" message: You're late for supper as usual.
"I" message: _____.
- "You" message: Will you ever learn to hang up your own clothes?
"I" message: _____.
- "You" message: You always leave the discipline to me.
"I" message: _____.
- "You" message: You're going to ruin us financially if you don't stop using our credit cards.
"I" message: _____.
- "You" message: You never notice what I wear.
"I" message: _____.

*Adapted from Leaders' News Sheet June 1990 Ruth and John Rowles
From resource files of Association for Couples in Marriage Enrichment (A.C.M.E.)*