

# USING COMMUNICATION SKILLS EFFECTIVELY

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## AGENDA

- Starter
- I Said This, but I Meant That
- I-Messages
- Try Them
- Conclusion
- Student Assessment

### Objectives

Students will recognize how miscommunication can escalate a conflict and even create new conflicts.

Students will apply assertive behavior skills to conflict situations.

Students will apply communication skills to conflicts in their own lives.

### Materials Needed

- One copy of the “Act Two” activity sheet for each student (Part I)
- One copy of the “I-Messages” activity sheet for each student (Part II)

**Starter (3 minutes)**

Draw a tic-tac-toe grid on the board and place an “X” in one of the squares. Without saying anything, point to a student and indicate that they should come to the front of the room. Hand the student a piece of chalk and look toward the game board. Play the game silently. If you win, smile broadly and raise your fists in victory. If you lose, frown as you cross your arms and sulk.

Thank the student, and ask them to be seated. Ask the following questions:

- What just happened here? (You and a student played a game of tic-tac-toe.)
- How did this happen if I never said a word? (You used gestures, or nonverbal cues, to challenge the student, and you both knew how to play the game.)
- Was I excited or disappointed at the end? How could you tell?

Remind students of the power of communicating assertively, both verbally and nonverbally. Say, “Today we’re going to explore how miscommunication affects conflicts and how you can communicate more effectively to resolve conflicts.”

**Part I I Said This, but I Meant That (20 minutes)**

Purpose: Students recognize how miscommunication can escalate a conflict and even create new conflicts.

**1. Students role-play a scenario.**

Distribute copies of the “Act Two” activity sheet to students. Give students time to read through the activity sheet. Then, ask for volunteers to play the roles of the parent and Sam, using only the first part of dialogue (the words that were actually said).

**2. Students discuss the scenario.**

Begin a discussion about the layers of miscommunication in this scenario by asking the following questions:

- Where did this conflict really begin? In other words, what was Act One? (getting detention in school)
- How did Sam react to the parent's anger at the beginning of Act Two? (aggressively)
- Why do you think Sam reacted this way? (because the parent was angry and Sam felt defensive)
- Why didn't Sam say what he really meant? (because Sam was embarrassed)
- What did Sam do after realizing that he forgot to call home? (blamed the teacher)
- What will the consequence of this miscommunication be? (The parent is going to call Sam's teacher.)
- Do you think this conflict is over? Why or why not? (No; if the parent calls Sam's teacher, another conflict will begin.)

### **3. Students role-play other versions of the scenario.**

Ask two other volunteers to play the roles of the parent and Sam, this time using the second set of dialogue (what the characters meant).

When they have finished, ask where the communication in this version fails. (After the parent's line, "Did you forget that you had a dentist appointment?") Explain that at this point, communication falls apart because at times, Sam and the parent are no longer talking about the same things.

Ask for two more volunteers to play the roles of the parent and Sam. Explain that when the parent gets to their second line ("Did you forget that you had a dentist appointment?"), you will ask the volunteers to freeze and improvise a completely new ending to the scenario—one in which the characters say what they mean and avoid creating a new conflict.

If necessary, guide the Sam character to explain why he was late, and the parent character to remind Sam of the importance of calling home if he is delayed for any reason.

### **4. Students reflect on the importance of communication.**

Point out that it is not always easy for us to say what we mean, and that we often say things we don't mean. Say, "In the case of Sam, when he caught himself misspeaking, he stuck to it. What else could he have done?" (Students might respond: he could have corrected himself.) Ask, "How would this have changed things?" (Students should say that the communication between Sam and the parent could have improved.)

Say, "Communicating effectively by saying what you mean can be difficult, but the more you work at it, the easier it gets."

**Part II I-Messages (15 minutes)**

Purpose: Students will apply assertive behavior skills to conflict situations.

**1. Students recall the importance of assertive behavior.**

Point out that in the last version of the scenario, Sam and the parent were demonstrating more assertive behavior. They were speaking and acting assertively, and were able to communicate more effectively as a result.

Ask if anyone can recall how to be assertive, rather than passive or aggressive. Through questions and prompts, guide students to review the following criteria that they learned earlier in the year (see “Lesson 4: Being Assertive” of Module One: Communication):

- Make eye contact.
- Speak calmly, clearly, and confidently.
- Use words that show you are a responsible person.
- Say what you mean in a respectful manner.
- Be sure that your body language and your words are sending the same message.
- Listen to the other person and think about what they are saying.

Remind students that assertive behavior is usually the most successful way to communicate, especially in conflicts. Say, “Effective communication is the key to resolving conflicts.”

**2. Students apply assertive communication skills to conflicts.**

Tell students that when they are feeling upset or angry, they can use “I-messages” to help them be assertive. As you distribute copies of the “I-Messages” activity sheet, explain that I-messages can help students take responsibility for their feelings and begin discussions that will help resolve conflicts.

Give students time to read through the example on the activity sheet. Point out the following about each part of the I-message:

- It begins with “I,” not “you.” It also starts with a statement of feelings. Beginning this way ensures that the speaker and the listener are focusing on the emotions of the speaker rather than an accusation directed at the listener. Accusations do not encourage dialogue; they trigger conflicts because the listener feels as if they are being attacked, and therefore often refuses to listen. (Write “begin with ‘I,’ not ‘you’” on the board.)
- The second part is a factual description of the action that evoked certain emotions in the speaker. It simply states the problem or what happened. Notice that it does not contain accusations or insults, such as “when you are inconsiderate.” Such words will only escalate a conflict. (Write “describe the behavior” on the board.)
- The last part of the message explains why you are experiencing certain emotions. This part lets the listener know how and why the behavior affected the speaker. Again, it is important to focus on what is important to you, and not on accusing or blaming the other person. (Write “explain how the behavior affected you” on the board.)

### 3. Students use I-messages to express their feelings.

Invite students to fill out the remainder of the activity sheet. Suggest that students refer to the “Sometimes I Feel...” activity sheet from Lesson 2 for help. Remind them that the “Sometimes I Feel...” activity sheet lists an entire vocabulary of feelings.

When students are finished, ask volunteers to share what they wrote. As they respond, have them express themselves in an assertive manner. If time permits, invite other students to role-play the person receiving the message, describe how they would react to the message, and explain why. Point out that practicing such messages out loud will help prepare students to deliver I-messages more effectively.

### 4. Students discuss how I-messages demonstrate assertive behavior.

Have students describe assertive behavior. Ask, “Can using I-messages help you to behave more assertively? How?” (Students should say that using I-messages allows them to speak calmly, clearly, and confidently, and say what they mean in a respectful manner.)

## Part III Try Them (10 minutes)

Purpose: Students apply communication skills to conflicts in their own lives.

### 1. Students reflect on conflicts in their own lives.

Ask students to think about a conflict that they have been in recently, or one in which they are currently involved. Tell them to think about the details of the conflict, and to think about how they reacted. Remind them to also think about the other person in the conflict.

### 2. Students choose a conflict to address.

Give students the remainder of the class period to write I-messages that explain how they felt and why. Tell them to be sure that they identify the conflicts before writing their I-messages.

Remind students that when they deliver their I-messages, it is very important to be assertive—to speak calmly and clearly, and to control their emotions. If they can do this, then they will be able to listen actively to the other person’s response, and continue a dialogue that will resolve the conflict.

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### Conclusion (2 minutes)

Ask students to look again at the “Act Two” activity sheet and to identify the I-messages they find. (Both the parent and Sam used forms of I-messages in their “meant” dialogues.) Elicit from students the following **key points** that were taught in this lesson:

- Speaking and acting assertively helps us communicate more effectively— especially in conflicts.
- Speaking calmly and controlling our emotions helps us express ourselves assertively and resolve conflicts.
- Good communication is the key to resolving conflicts.

### Student Assessment

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1. List three reasons why miscommunication occurs.
2. Imagine that you are trying to read, but another person nearby is being very loud. Describe an aggressive way to ask that person to be quiet, not using an I-message. Then, describe how you could assertively ask that person to be quiet, using an I-message.
3. List three reasons why using I-messages is an effective way to communicate.

## LESSON EXTENSIONS

### Using Quotations

“Kindness is more important than wisdom, and the recognition of this is the beginning of wisdom.”

As a class, discuss how kindness and understanding can help resolve a conflict, while forcing one's opinions can often escalate it. Have students brainstorm times when they could have used kindness to resolve a conflict.

### Addressing Multiple Learning Styles

I-messages focus attention and conversation on the speaker and their feelings. Have students draw I-messages. Ask them to fold a piece of drawing paper in half. Have students reflect on a conflict they have had and draw the way that they saw the conflict on one half and the other person's perspective on the other half.

Discuss how seeing both sides of a conflict can help to resolve it.

### Writing in Your Journal

Have students write about an experience they had in the past week where they were able to avoid an argument or conflict.

Discuss how students were able to accomplish this. Ask, “Was avoiding this argument or conflict easy or difficult?”

### Using Technology

Have students search online for information on internet etiquette. Discuss common breaches of internet etiquette and how they are perceived (e.g., typing in all capital letters is seen as shouting).

Discuss how sending an email, text, or instant message can often escalate a conflict, as emotions are difficult to convey online. Tell students that following proper internet etiquette can help them express themselves online.

## Homework

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Have students investigate different gestures used to communicate in other cultures. Have them also research gestures that have different meanings depending on the culture.

Discuss how simple miscommunications due to cultural differences can cause conflict

## Additional Resources


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Discuss writing as a means of communicating effectively.


Allow students to choose a prompt from *350 Fabulous Writing Prompts* by Jacqueline Sweeney. Have students work on their prompts. Then, have them share their work with the class and explain what they hoped to communicate.



## ACT TWO



Read what each person says. Also, read the text beneath the dialogue to find out what each person meant to say.



**PARENT:** (*upset, angry*) Where have you been?  
(*You're over an hour late, and I've been really worried.*)

**SAM:** (*defensively*) At school.  
(*I got detention and I'm kind of embarrassed about it.*)

**PARENT:** (*confused*) But school was over an hour ago! What have you been doing?  
(*Did you forget that you had a dentist appointment?*)

**SAM:** (*insulted*) I told you! I was at school! The teacher made us stay late.  
(*Don't you believe me? Oops, did I say "us"?*)



**PARENT:** (*frustrated*) Why?  
(*Please just explain why you are so late.*)

**SAM:** (*anxiously*) Because somebody was throwing spitballs and the teacher got mad, so the class got detention.  
(*Well, really just me, because I threw some spitballs.*)

**PARENT:** (*wary*) That doesn't seem fair, but you should have had enough sense to call.  
(*And you weren't involved?*)

**SAM:** (*resentfully*) Well, the teacher wouldn't let us leave the room!  
(*I forgot to call. That's what I should have done.*)

**PARENT:** (*angry*) That's it! I'm going to call your teacher about this! I had to cancel your dental appointment!



# I-MESSAGES

I-messages are a great way to explain yourself when you are upset. When you use them, people are more likely to listen to you and to respond without becoming angry and defensive. Read the example, and then try to write your own I-messages.

## EXAMPLE

Someone in your household often forgets to give you your messages.

I feel upset

when you don't give me my messages

because they are important to me.

1. A classmate has started calling you by a nickname that you dislike.

I feel \_\_\_\_\_

when you \_\_\_\_\_

because \_\_\_\_\_

2. Your teacher hasn't called on you all week, even though you've raised your hand.

I feel \_\_\_\_\_

when you \_\_\_\_\_

because \_\_\_\_\_

3. One of your friends often borrows your things and doesn't return them.

I feel \_\_\_\_\_

when you \_\_\_\_\_

because \_\_\_\_\_