

Training Session 7

"I" Messages

Purpose:

- To practice formulating and using "I" messages.

Length: 1 hour and 15-20 minutes

Materials: Six sheets of flipchart paper, each with one of the following questions written at the top:

- What would you say to someone who cuts in front of you in line?
- What would you say to someone who does not let you join in an activity on the schoolyard or in class?
- What would you say to someone who ignores you when you ask a question?
- What would you say to someone who makes a nasty comment about one of your family members?
- What would you say to someone who makes fun of something you are wearing?
- What would you say to someone who is spreading a rumor about you?

Procedure:

1. Explain that active listening is crucial to effective communication, but just as important is developing the skill of clearly telling the other person what you want that person to hear. Read the information on "I" messages together with the participants. (10 minutes)
2. Split the participants in to 6 groups. Hand each group one of the sheets of paper. Instruct the group to appoint a recorder to write down all the responses the group can think of. (10 minutes)
3. Invite each group to share their work; post the completed sheets around the room. (15 minutes)
4. Discuss how in a conflict situation it is most effective to speak with the intent of stating your issues or the problem in a clear, direct way, which usually results in a receptive, constructive response. When speaking to be understood, we avoid name-calling, criticism, sarcasm and making demands.
5. Encourage the participants to examine the sheets posted around the room and to find statements that are good examples of speaking to be understood.
6. Explain that in conflict situations, instead of focusing on the motivations and intentions of the other person, it is better to *speak about yourself*. Instead of complaining about the other person, and using statements that begin with "you," such as "you make me so mad when you do that," describe the situation in terms of yourself by using statements that begin with "I."
7. Refer to the flipchart with the I statement formula:
 - I feel _____ (specific emotion) when you _____ (specific behavior) because I need _____ (specific need). Would you be willing to _____ (specific request).

Refer participants to the list of needs in their toolkit, as well as the list of emotions, which can be helpful when practicing this skill.

8. Find a few examples from the flipcharts that could be made better and ask the participants to revise them to communicate more clearly using I statements. *(10 minutes)*

9. Explain that sending clear messages means that you speak for a purpose, which means that you think about what you want the other person to understand and what purpose the information will serve. It is important not to assume that the other person knows what you know or sees the problem the same way that you do. On the other hand, some information that we possess may not help in resolving the conflict and so is best left unsaid.

10. Finally, point out that it is important to speak with consideration for the listener. This means being sensitive to the other person. You want him or her to listen to you, so be aware of how he or she is acting while you speak. If the other person is not using attending behavior (active listening) find out why. Maybe you are talking too fast or too loud, or maybe you are too close or too far away. Maybe you are too friendly, or not friendly enough. If the person you are talking to is not attending, ask what you can do to make your message clearer.

11. Have the participants form groups of three. Tell participants they will use the six situations presented to practice sending clear messages. One will be the speaker, one will be the person who created the conflict, and the third will be an observer.

Instruct the speaker to send a clear message to the person who created the conflict.

Instruct the person who created the conflict to listen to the message without interrupting, and to practice his or her active listening skills.

Instruct the observer to think about what we have learned about sending clear "I messages" and to tell the speaker how he or she did.

12. Have each participant take the role of speaker for two of the situations. After two situations, rotate the roles: each speaker becomes an observer and each observer becomes a listener. After another two situations, the roles rotate again so that each participant has a chance to perform in each role for two situations. *(15 minutes)*

13. To summarize, ask the participants how it went, what was easy and what was difficult in sending clear messages and in listening to them. *(15 minutes)*

Processing questions:

Did they manage to use "I statements" and to avoid blaming or criticizing the other person? Was it helpful?

What was difficult about this exercise? What was easy?

How is this skill related to being a peer mediator? How will it help us during mediation?