



SITUATION-FOCUSED 'I' STATEMENTS

Communicating Feelings Without Assigning Blame

Name (optional): _____

Date: _____

A different way to think about 'I' statements

Many people learn 'I' statements as: 'I feel ____ when you ____.' Although that starts with 'I,' it can still sound blaming because the focus quickly shifts to the other person. A situation-focused 'I' statement keeps the focus on the situation, your emotional response, the impact on you, and - when helpful - a respectful request.

The goal is not to avoid difficult conversations. The goal is to communicate clearly without unnecessary blame, reduce defensiveness, and improve the chances of being heard.

Traditional vs. situation-focused

TRADITIONAL

- 'I feel ____ when you ____.'
- Often centers the other person's action.
- Can still be heard as criticism.

SITUATION-FOCUSED

- 'I feel ____ when ____ happens.'
- Centers the situation instead of the person.
- Makes room for impact, understanding, and solutions.

The four parts

1 SITUATION What is happening?	2 FEELING What do I feel?	3 IMPACT Why does it matter?	4 REQUEST What would help?
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1 BUILD THE STATEMENT

Focus on the situation, feeling, impact, and request

A situation-focused 'I' statement works best when it describes the situation without blame, names a true feeling, explains the impact, and - when needed - makes a respectful request.

Part 1: Describe the situation

Use observable facts. Avoid motives, labels, or character judgments.

Example: Instead of 'You never tell me when you're late,' try 'When it gets late and I have not received an update...'

Part 2: Name your feeling

Use an emotion word, not a disguised accusation.

concerned frustrated disappointed	worried hurt overwhelmed	confused anxious lonely	discouraged embarrassed sad
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I feel...

Part 3: Explain the impact

Why does the situation matter to you?

Part 4: Make a request

A request helps the other person know what may improve the situation.

2 PUT IT TOGETHER

Move from blame to clarity

The formula does not need to be rigid. It is a guide to help you communicate your experience clearly.

Core formula

When _____ **happens,**

I feel _____.

The impact on me is _____.

What would help me is _____.

Compare the difference

Blaming	You can't keep coming home so late. It's inconsiderate.
Situation-focused	I feel worried when it gets late and I have not heard anything because I do not know whether everything is okay. A quick message when plans change would help me worry less.

Blaming	You never call me. I guess you do not care.
Situation-focused	I feel hurt and disconnected when a long period passes without us talking. Staying connected matters to me. I would like us to find a way to communicate more regularly.

Blaming	You keep dumping work on me at the last minute.
Situation-focused	I feel overwhelmed when additional tasks are added with little time or instruction because it becomes difficult for me to keep up with expectations. What would help me is clearer notice and prioritization.

Try a short rewrite

Take a blaming or traditional statement and rewrite it in a situation-focused way.

3 PRACTICE SCENARIOS

Practice on structured examples

Scenario 1

You made plans to meet a friend at a restaurant. You arrived and waited. Shortly before the meeting time, you learned that the plans had been canceled.

Describe the situation:	
What do you feel?	
What is the impact on you?	
What would help?	

Put it together:

When _____ happens, I feel _____. The impact on me is _____. What would help me is _____.

Scenario 2

You are part of a group project. Some assigned work has not been completed, and you have repeatedly taken on additional tasks so the project can continue.

Describe the situation:	
What do you feel?	
What is the impact on you?	
What would help?	

Put it together:

When _____ happens, I feel _____. The impact on me is _____. What would help me is _____.

4 PRACTICE AND PERSONAL APPLICATION

Use the framework in real-life situations

Scenario 3

Additional work continues to be added to your workload with limited instructions and limited time. Even after working extra hours, the work continues to accumulate.

Describe the situation:	
What do you feel?	
What is the impact on you?	
What would help?	

Put it together:

When _____ happens, I feel _____. The impact on me is _____. What would help me is _____.

Try one from your own life

Think of a situation in which you want to communicate something difficult without assigning blame.

What happened?

What do you feel?

Why does it matter to you?

What would help?

My situation-focused 'I' statement

When _____ happens, I feel _____. The impact on me is _____. What would help me is _____.

5 BEFORE YOU SAY IT

A final check before a difficult conversation

Ask yourself

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Am I describing the situation rather than accusing the person? | ☐ Did I explain how the situation affects me? |
| ☐ Did I name an emotion rather than a judgment? | ☐ Is my request clear and reasonable? |
| ☐ Am I assuming I know the other person's intentions? | ☐ Am I calm enough to be heard? |

If the conversation gets heated

- Slow down and breathe.
- Return to the situation rather than blame.
- Stay with your feeling and the impact.
- Pause if needed and come back later.

Quick reference

- Focus on the situation.
- Own your feeling.
- Explain the impact.
- Ask for what would help.

When _____ happens, I feel _____.

The impact on me is _____.

What would help me is _____.

The purpose of an 'I' statement is not to disguise blame by putting 'I feel' in front of it. The purpose is to communicate your experience clearly while giving the other person room to hear you and participate in solving the problem.

Adapted from Therapist Aid, 'I Statements' worksheet. Adaptation, updates, expanded exercises, and situation-focused communication framework by Margaret Robertson, 2026.

If you find yourself in a state of emergency

Do not wait for a routine therapy response.

If you are experiencing a mental health or behavioral health emergency, feel unable to stay safe, or believe you may hurt yourself or someone else, contact emergency or crisis services immediately. Do not wait for a scheduled appointment, voicemail, or email response. If the situation is life-threatening, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department.

Kitsap County

EMERGENCY 911	For a life-threatening emergency or immediate danger, call 911.
SALISH CRISIS 1-888-910-0416	24/7 regional crisis line for Kitsap, Clallam, and Jefferson counties. Crisis counselors provide support, connect callers with local resources, and can coordinate local crisis response when appropriate.
KMHS CRISIS 888-910-0416	Kitsap Mental Health Services provides 24/7 mobile crisis outreach and a Crisis Triage Center for eligible adults. Access crisis services through the Salish Regional Crisis Line above or by texting 988.

Washington State

988 LIFELINE CALL OR TEXT 988	Free, confidential, 24/7/365 support for mental health, substance use, suicidal crisis, or emotional distress. You can also contact 988 if you are worried about someone else.
RECOVERY HELP 1-866-789-1511	Washington Recovery Help Line - 24/7 support and referral for mental health, substance use, and problem gambling concerns.

MAR Mental Health Therapy, PLLC

Crisis-informed care, but not emergency response.

MAR Mental Health Therapy, PLLC does not provide 24/7 crisis or emergency services. Dr. Margaret Robertson has extensive education and clinical experience helping people work through crisis-related concerns, stabilization, trauma, and recovery. When a situation is urgent or life-threatening, use the crisis resources on this page first. After immediate safety needs are addressed, MAR can help support ongoing treatment and recovery.

Website: www.marmentalhealththerapy.com

Email: margaretrobertson2@gmail.com

Email is not monitored continuously and should not be used for urgent or emergency needs.

Crisis resource information verified August 2026 using

Washington State Health Care Authority, Kitsap County / Salish BH-ASO, and Kitsap Mental Health Services.