

Slowing Down the Escalator with "I" Messages

In this lesson participants learn how using "I" messages can slow down escalation, giving us a chance to resolve a conflict.

What to Know

We've learned that conflict escalates in steps or stages. When we use "I" statements, we are communicating to another person *our* experience, in contrast to a "you" statement which assumes we know what the other person is thinking or feeling and can make that person defensive. An "I" message is a statement that is subjective, not objective, so others will be less inclined to argue the point. Done well, an "I" message will not include blaming or labeling of the other person, but will demonstrate honest communication of a need to be met, even if that need is only to be heard.

Like all skills, learning how to use I-messages takes practice and time to develop. Give students plenty of opportunity to practice this in direct skill instruction such as the scenarios presented below and in teachable moments, when conflicts between students present themselves or when students need to share their own experiences or feelings.

Objectives

Participants will be able to:

1. Identify "you" messages as conflict escalates:
2. Create an "I" message: and,
3. Role-play using an "I" message in a conflict situation.

Common Core Standard Alignment

- Anchor Standards for Literacy: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7 - Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
- Anchor Standards for Writing: Production and Distribution of Writing
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4 - Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- Anchor Standards for Writing: Range of Writing
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.10 - Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.
- Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1 - Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.2 - Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
- Anchor Standards for Language-Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.5- Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.6-Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.

Materials:

- index cards
- pencils or markers
- large cut-out of a hand with a pointed finger
- colored construction paper or cardstock
- various art materials for simple decoration-stickers, dot markers, glitter glue

Gather Together/Warm Up/Bell Ringer (5 minutes)

Hand out index cards. Ask students to write down how they would feel if you said to them, "You always forget to put the art supplies away!" Have all students hold up their card for everyone to see their feeling word. Invite students to look around at everyone else's cards. Point out the range of emotions. Ask: *"What do these feelings have in common?"*

Now have students write on the back of their index cards how they would feel if you said to them: "I feel frustrated when the art supplies don't get put away." Have all students hold up their cards for everyone to see their feeling words. Point out the range of emotions. Ask: *"What do these feelings have in common?"*

Main Activity: "I" messages and Role Plays:

Introduce "I" messages.

Say: *"The statement "You always forget to put the art supplies away" is a "you" message. "You" messages begin with "you" and tend to escalate or make conflicts worse. The other person feels attacked so they try to defend themselves or retaliate with a counterattack. And that can send both parties up the conflict escalator. "You" messages are like a big finger pointing and poking at another person. Almost everybody tries to defend themselves from the poking, pointing finger."*

Pull out your over-sized pointed finger cut-out. Use it in a silly way to "point the finger." *"You always. . ." "You never ...," "You shouldn't have ...," etc.* Ask students how it feels to have the (over-sized) finger pointed at them, even in a silly way.

Tell students that today they are going to practice using "I" messages instead of "you" messages. "I" messages are a way of communicating in a clear, strong way. Using "I" messages can help you express your feelings and make your needs known without being mean and without escalating a conflict.

With an "I" message the speaker identifies his feelings about a problem instead of attacking the other person. This makes the listener feel more willing to try to solve the problem.

"I" messages usually have the following format (write on the board):

1. I feel _____
2. when _____
3. because _____

Practice making "I" messages with the group. Ask for volunteers to turn the following "you" messages into "I" messages using the format for an "I" message. Have students use the over-sized finger to point to themselves when they say an "I" statement.

You never save me a seat in the cafeteria. (I feel upset when you don't save me a seat in the cafeteria because I want to sit with you.)

You always leave me out when you play jump rope. (I feel hurt when you don't let me play jump rope because I worry that it's because you think I'm not good at it or that you don't like me.)

You keep racing to get in line in front of me. (I feel annoyed when you run in front of me to get in line because it makes me feel rushed and stressed.)

Role Plays

Note: In advance, review the scenarios included on the role-play cards. If a scenario included here applies to only one student in your classroom, substitute it with a less emotionally charged scenario. For example, if there is only one child in your classroom in a wheelchair, instead of using the scenario "A classmate makes fun of a student in a wheelchair," substitute something related such as, "A classmate makes fun of student with an arm or leg in a cast."

Have two students volunteer to present the following skit. In this skit the conflict will escalate with Child (1) using a "you" message.

Scenario 1: Child (1) is standing in line in the cafeteria when Child (2) pushes right in front of him or her. Lights, Camera, Action, BEGIN!

After a minute or two call "FREEZE." Now have Child (1) express his or her feelings about Child (2)'s behavior using an "I" message, following the format for "I" messages as you wrote it on the board. Allow Child (1) to use the "pointed finger" to point toward themselves when they say their "I" message.

Break students in pairs and have them choose to be either Child (1) or Child (2). Ask children to stand back to back with their partners. Describe scenario 2 as noted below and then have children turn around to face their partners and enact it using an "I" message.

Scenario 2: Child (1) trips over Child (2)'s foot in the cafeteria and thinks Child (2) stuck it out on purpose. (Optional: Allow a few students to have a turn using the "pointed finger.") When students have finished, discuss. Child (2): How did it feel when Child (1) used an "I" message? Child (1): How was that different from the first skit when a "you" message was used?

Use the handout "More Practice Making 'I' Messages." Still working in pairs and back to back, have students pick three role-plays each from a hat or box. For each scenario on their role-play card, the child will make an "I" statement to her partner about her feelings about the action, using the "I" message format as described on the board.

Integrated Arts: Mini- Finger Pointers (10 minutes)

IMPORTANT: You will want to set firm ground rules so that students use these props as intended.

Students work together to draw and cut out a smaller version (a kid-sized hand) of the pointed finger used for the lesson. Divide students into groups of three or four. Have students glue their finger to the cardstock. Students copy the "I" message format from the chart onto the cardstock on or around the finger, and decorate the front with art materials. Each group writes a slogan ("Got "I" messages?" or "Go down the escalator!") on the back of the cardstock. Keep the "pointed fingers" in a bin. They can be used to for future role-plays to model "I" messages or during teachable moments throughout the school day.

Closing: Positive "I" Messages (5 minutes)

Call the group back together. Tell students that "I" messages can be used to express positive feelings too. *"Let's do a go round using positive "I" messages, letting someone or a group know something that we feel good about".*

Model for the class: *"I feel inspired when I see our class learn a new skill and see them get better and better at it."*

Other examples:

- *"I feel appreciated when you make a picture for me."*
- *"I feel happy when you share your feelings."*

Grade Level Modifications

K-1

During the Gathering, have students draw a face on the index cards instead of writing how they would feel. For the role-plays, read aloud the extra scenarios to the students. Follow instructions for grades 2-5 for the rest of the activity.

6-12

Instead of practicing the I-messages as a large group, have students in the large group together write I-message scenario cards based on conflict that they have been involved in, which you can then project for the class to use as they practice them. Remind the young people to not use names in their conflict scenarios.

For the Integrated Arts project have students in groups write and record PSAs to be used on your school PA system to teach about I-Messages and why they work.

Follow instructions for grades 2-5 for the rest of the activity.

Curricular Connections

K-5 Literacy: Read Dr. Seuss' [*The Zax*](#). Have students draw a picture of the Zax and write a new rule for the Zax to live by, instead of "Never Budge," that might help them stay off the escalator. Older kids can write their ideas as a letter to one of the Zax. Display students' work or make a class book called "The Zax New Rules to Live By." (See handout.)

K-5 Literacy and Art: Have students create "conflict toolboxes," decorated boxes filled with items that represent key skills you need to resolve a conflict peacefully. Some possible things to include might be a large cutout letter "I," as a reminder to use "I" messages, cutout shoes for perspective taking, etc. Invite students to have as much fun as possible with this. Then during transitions, such as when the class is coming back from recess or lunch, ask a few students to share what they have in their toolboxes, as a way to refocus and reconnect the group. Or invite students to get the conflict toolboxes when they are in a conflict and need help.

K-12 Literacy and Social Studies: Start a T-chart with one side labeled "you" messages and one side labeled "I" messages. Make a box on each side for tally marks. As you read stories and/or news articles or explore history, record with words and tally marks any "you" or "I" messages you hear. Encourage students to add to the chart when they come across examples in their independent reading. Add to the chart examples from daily life in or out of the classroom. Discuss their experiences with both of these kinds of statements.

2-12 Literacy: Have students write a short story involving a conflict and how it's solved. Have students brainstorm lists of characters and traits on their own and choose two characters. As a group, brainstorm a master list of conflicts that could be included in their short story (animals arguing over where to build their nest, siblings trying to decide the best way to earn money for a special trip, etc.) Have students choose a conflict for their

story. In the story, encourage students to 1) include the characters going up the escalator, 2) show one character having an “aha!” moment where they realize they are on the escalator and decide to change course, and 3) include at least three different actions (including “I” messages) that are taken that help get the characters off the escalator.

2-5 Literacy and Drama: Follow the procedure for the short story above, except have students write it as a play in cooperative groups. Have each group practice acting out and directing their play for the class. Optional: Film student performances. If permissions are obtained, share via parent email or show films during school-wide open house.

Grades 6-12 Media Literacy: Have students look at their social media newsfeeds for examples of “I” Messages vs. “You” messages. Compare channels: which is the most negative newsfeed? Which is the more positive? How might students influence that trend?

More Practice Making "I" Messages Role-Play Cards (handout 1)

<p>A classmate keeps teasing you about your glasses. They may not mean to hurt you, but it bothers you anyway.</p>	<p>A friend of yours wants you to join in making fun of a homeless person.</p>
<p>Some kids at lunch make fun of the clothes you are wearing.</p>	<p>A classmate makes fun of a student in a wheelchair.</p>
<p>You hear that a student you don't know well is spreading rumors about you that aren't true.</p>	<p>A friend of yours is being teased for having braces.</p>
<p>Your parents do not speak English. You find out that someone in your class, who you thought was your friend, makes fun of your parents behind your back.</p>	<p>Someone on the bus always bullies you to give up your seat for him when he gets on.</p>

Handout 2 Slowing Down the Escalator with I Messages

Draw a picture of the Zax arguing. Use speech bubbles to show what they might be saying to one another.



Create and write a new rule for the Zax to live by.



Draw a picture of the Zax living by their new rule. What will they say now?

