

Nonviolent Communication, Handouts

I-speech

I-speech is a nonviolent communication technique that enables the expression of needs and wishes and aims to improve understanding of the other and of oneself. It is concrete and focuses on a specific problem. I-speech clearly speaks about behaviour and the emotions caused by it, without judging the person.

I-speech does not lead to avoiding conflict but to opening communication about the causes of the conflict. It opens up communication and shows our readiness to talk and to seek a mutually acceptable resolution. It helps us focus on ourselves, our real needs, wishes, rights.

In conflicts, we often exhaust ourselves and each other with accusations, anger, insults, sulking, all of which leads to escalations and moves us away from what actually upset us, what really bothers us, what we need and what we really want.

I-speech takes us back to the beginning of the conflict, to what we really need, what we really want, or to what actually bothers us, but without causing a defensive reaction from the other side.

I-speech criticises the behaviour and not the person.

Structure of I-speech:

“When I see that...”

(we talk about an action of the other person in a way that does not involve a value judgement)

“... I feel ...” or “... I wish that ...”

(we speak about our emotional reaction without self-accusation or justification)

“I would wish to...” or “I would like to...”

(we speak about a personal need and desired outcome without giving orders or using blackmail)

Examples:

When you tell me to shut up, I feel hurt and as if you don't care at all about me and my opinion. I would like for us to be able to talk and for you to tell me what it is that's really bothering you.

When I return from work tired like this and find the sink full of unwashed dishes, I feel bad, and I would like us to share chores.

Additional Clarifications

I-messages: taking issue with the behaviour and not the person

System:

- The behaviour that bothers me...
- This makes me feel...
- Because...
- I would like to... (My wish is...)

Example of YOU-speech:

The trainer addresses a participant who keeps whispering while the trainer is talking, and says, "Alright, Milan, would you stop chatting, you're really disrespectful!"

Note: This statement directly attacks and judges a person. The reaction it would likely provoke is humiliation, retreat or counter-attack.

Example of WE-speech:

"We all know how disrespectful Milan is and that he never listens while others are speaking!"

Note: This statement presupposes that everyone agrees with it, which takes away room for different opinions, and also claims that Milan always acts the same way. WE speech is often encountered in discussions of political issues where presumptions are made that everyone shares the same majority opinion, resulting in lack of respect towards those who think differently and limiting their ability to express that other opinion. At the same time, WE-speech depersonalises individual opinion and tends towards removing individual responsibility for one's own attitude and behaviour. The widely held attitude that every action supported by the majority of the group is justifiable because it is "democratic" reflects the view that democracy is a dictatorship of the majority where the disenfranchised minority is supposed to share in the responsibility for actions.

Example of I-speech:

"Milan, it bothers me when you interrupt me. I get the sense that you don't care about my opinion, that you don't respect me, and I would like for you to hear me out, because I would appreciate your thoughts on what I am saying."

Some Nonviolent Communication Techniques

Active Listening

Characteristics of active listening:

- Not interrupting the speaker with: "And why did you...", "You could have...", "You should have...", or bringing in your own experiences: "I also..."
- Facing the speaker
- Not interrupting suddenly or "ambushing"
- Listening with interest and patience
- Allowing for silences and pauses for the speaker to collect his/her thoughts
- Reflecting back what is heard
- Trying to understand the speaker's position and empathising with it
- Not imposing your own advice
- Encouraging the speaker with gestures and body language
- Being supportive by being present, such as: "I heard you..."

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing or repeating in your own words the key points or emotions heard from the speaker. This helps us check whether we had perhaps drifted off and gives the speaker an opportunity to look at the issue once again.

We usually start a paraphrase with: "If I understood correctly, you said..." or "As far as I can tell, you are saying..."

Open-ended Questions

Open-ended questions are formulated so that they cannot be answered with a simple "yes" or "no". Instead, they enable freedom of expression outside the narrow focus of the question.

If we ask questions beginning with "Do you...?" or "Did you...?", they contain an inherent presumption of a very limited scope for an answer. If we formulate a question with "How...?" or "What...?", they can be answered from the point of view of the speaker.

Examples of closed questions:

Was this exercise difficult or easy for you?

Was the communication in the group good or bad?

Examples of open-ended questions:

How did you find this exercise? What was difficult and what was easy, and why?

What was the communication between people like?

Some Rules of Feedback

The following rules and methods enable and encourage:

- giving feedback
- receiving feedback
- developing a desire to give and receive feedback

Giving feedback

1. Focus on what you think the person is doing, and not on what you think the person is like. Describe how their actions affect you.
2. Talk about what you see or hear, not about what you think was the cause of events.
3. Give criticism immediately (as much as possible) after a behaviour that bothered you. Give criticism when your interlocutor is able to receive it.
4. Give feedback in order to express your ideas and feelings, not in order to give advice.
5. Give as much information as your interlocutor can receive (giving more than that is primarily aimed at satisfying yourself, not helping your interlocutor).
6. Use clear and new (fresh) examples.
7. Think about the value of your criticism for your interlocutor, not about the release it may bring you. Ask yourself: "Do I want to inform or 'give as good as I get'?"
8. Feedback may be transmitted through speech and/or gestures, eye contact, body language.
9. Make sure what you say is not judging or threatening others, either by your tone or choice of words.
10. Criticise only what your interlocutor can change.
11. Your criticism will be better when elicited by the other person than when you impose it yourself.
12. Give feedback with genuine feeling and warmth whenever appropriate.

Receiving feedback

1. Try to listen with an open mind – to convey the message of listening, not defensiveness. Don't think you have to accept everything. Accept and do what seems appropriate at the time.
2. Keep in mind that feedback is only the opinion of the person giving it. Ask for feedback from others in order to check whether it coincides with the initial feedback you received.

Source: Diana Francis, 1993