

When your child misbehaves:

Use “I” messages.

“I” messages don’t blame or put down.

- They describe what is wrong.
- They say why it bothers the parent.
- They share how the problem makes the parent feel.

For example:

A “You” message might be—“Go play. You’re being a pest and your noise is giving me a headache.”

An “I” message explains the parent’s feelings—“When I come home tired from a long day, I get frustrated when things are noisy. Please play quietly in your room for awhile.”

Whether the parent is upset because of the child or something else, it is important for parents to explain their feelings to help the child see how their behavior affects other people.

When parents are pleased or proud of a child, they should tell and show the child how they feel. The child’s sense of self-worth grows stronger with encouragement and appreciation.

Grown-ups, too

“I” messages aren’t just for parents and children. When adults have problems or misunderstandings with one another, using an “I” message can be surprisingly helpful in finding solutions.

Putting Knowledge to Work



When you have a question, call or visit your local office of The University of Georgia’s Cooperative Extension Service.

You’ll find a friendly, well-trained staff ready to help you with information, advice, and free publications covering agriculture and natural resources, family and consumer sciences, 4-H and youth development.

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TIPS FOR PARENTS

Talking About Feelings



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Talking About Feelings

Children don't always understand what their parents are thinking or doing or why they are thinking or doing it. This is probably not news to anyone.

It is important, though, for children to understand how their parents feel when they act a certain way—happy, loving, angry, tired, or sad. Children also need for their parents to know how *they* feel.



The hardest feelings for children to understand are the negative ones. They may think that they have caused their parents' sadness or anger.

These feelings may be hard to discuss, especially if you weren't allowed to talk about your own feelings as a child. But learning to

express feelings without put-downs, belittling others, or sarcasm helps children explore their own feelings.

Most of us *feel* much more than we show. And few of us explain to others how we feel and why.

And too many times, we express the negative emotions more easily than we share positive ones.

Feelings and discipline

Have you ever been misunderstood by your child? It can happen very easily, for example:

Six-year-old Sally and seven-year-old John were playing clowns. Both agreed that they would look more like clowns if their hair was cut in lots of lengths. So the children took turns cutting "Clown Hair." Then their mother came in.

She said, "Look what you've done! I can't trust you alone for a minute. You just don't give me a moment's peace, and your hair looks horrible. You'll be punished for this!"

The children's mother was understandably upset. But, look again at how she expressed her feelings. In just 4 sentences, she told the children they were:

- not trustworthy
- pests
- ugly
- bad

Their mother *was upset*, but she really did not intend to damage their self-esteem. She wanted to make sure they never cut "Clown Hair" *ever again*.

What can you do?

What can a parent say that will help children learn:

- cooperation
- responsibility
- and sensitivity to others' feelings

in a gentle way that will still help the child understand that his behavior was not appropriate?



Begin by talking about other people's feelings. Children will be more likely to recognize and understand such feelings when they see them later on.

During quiet times, encourage your child to share his feelings about a time when he felt strong emotions. Help him name the emotions and talk about how they make him feel in his heart and mind.