



## ***SEXUAL LIFE IMPROVEMENT, INC.***

*~ From the desk of Shelley L. Imholte, PhD, LCSW, MSW, M.Ed.*

### **Effective Communication**

The foundation of effective communication begins with individual ownership, expressions of accountability supported by emotions. **I-Statements** are one method of effective communication due to the emphasis on individual ownership rather than blaming. Not only do I-Statements strengthen communication, but they also assist with identifying emotions, expressing those emotions, and decreasing defensiveness.

**AVOID** inserting *'that'* or *'like'* in communication as they communicate an opinion or a judgement rather than an emotion. When one uses **"I feel"** in conversation it is natural for an emotional expression to follow.

**AVOID** camouflaged **YOU-Statements** when in communication. When **"I feel like you..."** or **"I feel that you"** are used in conversation the listener is put in a defensive position while the speaker is avoiding individual ownership of their contribution.

**WATCH** for an emphasis on negative feelings or circumstances that minimize emotional expressions of joy, gratitude, relief, or satisfaction and promote defensiveness.

**NOTICE** when you downplay the impact of emotional expressions. This tendency minimizes the intensity of the emotion, therefore minimizing feeling both heard and understood by whomever you are sharing your emotional world with.

I-Statements communicate in FOUR stages and require practice.

**Stage 1** "I feel (state an emotion)..."

**Stage 2** "when (identify what specific behavior was done that you are responding to)..."

**Stage 3** "because (identify what need is not being)..."

**Stage 4** "what I want is (describe the exact behavior that would meet the need)..."

### **Prostate Cancer I-Statement Specific Examples**

**Example:** *"Don't you know I am trying!"*

**Opinion:** *"I feel that with every attempt to try you have something to say"*

**Camouflaged;** *"I feel like you don't think I am trying!"*

**I-Statement:** *"I feel helpless when I hear that I have not done enough because I am trying to do what I can. What I want is to be supported."*

**Example:** *"I am counting on you to make things better."*

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**Judgement:** *“I feel like there is something more you could do.”*

**Camouflaged:** *“I feel like you don’t want things to be better.”*

**I-Statement:** *“I feel powerless when I do not know what to do because I am usually good at knowing an action to take. What I want is to be in partnership with you.”*

### **Communication Exercises**

#### ***Jammed Jar Exercise***

**MUTUALLY** find an empty jar, vase, even a box can work. **MUTUALLY** decide where the container sits. Pick a space to place the container where it can be seen daily to be reminded to engage in the exercise. **MUTUALLY** designate a time period (usually 2-3 weeks to start, weekly if this exercise fits for you and your partner(s)) that the container will hold what has not been said. When you see the container, consider where you are ‘jammed’ up and have not shared this with your partner(s) for whatever reason. Write down a sentence using **I-Statements only**, or even just a single word will do, on any type of paper, napkin, etc. Crumble it up and place it in the container.

Set aside a **MUTUALLY agreed** time to empty the jar together. **Turn off** phones, TV, radio, anything that distracts and be with. Flip a coin to see who begins then take turns pulling out one crumbled piece at a time. With each turn, breath, eye gaze, and voice what is on the paper without explanation or questioning, this is learning to be ‘with’.

#### ***Shared Journaling***

**MUTUALLY** select a journal, notebook, or pad of paper and **MUTUALLY** decide where the journal will be placed. Each partner(s) chooses either face up or face down to let the other partner(s) know there has been an entry. Use the flip a coin option **IF** either partner(s) is accommodating, have a preference! Write down an entry using **I-Statements only** and respond with **I-Statements only**. This journal is a conversation, **WATCH** for ‘you’ language. This exercise prepares you and your partner(s) for face-to-face conversations about sensitive topics.

This exercise is flexible. The partner(s) or single persons may use the journal to explore learned messages of sexuality, sexual expression, and cultural messages that influence sexuality and expression in the present. Journaling, whether with partner(s) or individually, supports exploration that may lead to choosing to change certain areas of your life.

#### ***Shared Sexual Fantasy***

**MUTUALLY** select a journal, notebook, or pad of paper and **MUTUALLY** decide where the journal will be placed. Each partner(s) chooses either face up or face down to let the other

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*partner(s) know there has been an entry. Use the flip a coin option **IF** either partner(s) is accommodating, have a preference! Write down an entry to begin creating a shared sexual fantasy notebook. **ALLOW** for creativity, imagination, and expression to 'flow', attempt to 'let go' of what is 'right' or attempting to write for the other partner(s) and instead go with what is present in your mind as the partnership co-creates erotic content. **NOTICE** how the body responds when approaching to read partner(s) entry, while reading, and while responding to assist with being in your body.*

*\*IF these exercises prove to be difficult to engage in on a regular basis it may suggest that professional help would be beneficial.*

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