**ASSERTIVENESS**

**Appropriate Assertiveness**

**When to use "I" Statements**

The essence of Appropriate Assertiveness is being able to state your case without arousing the defenses of the other person. The secret of success lies in saying how it is for you rather than what they should or shouldn't do. "The way I see it..." attached to your assertive statement, helps. A skilled "I" statement goes even further.

When you want to state your point of view helpfully, the "I" statement formula can be useful. An "I" statement says how it is on my side, how I see it.

You could waste inordinate quantities of brainpower debating how the other person will or won't respond. Don't! You do need to be sure that you haven't used inflaming language, which would be highly likely to cause a negative response i.e. it should be "clean". Because you don't know beforehand whether the other person will do what you want or not, the cleanest "I" statements are delivered not to force them to fix things, but to state what you need.

Use an "I" statement when you need to let the other person know you are feeling strongly about the issue. Others often underestimate how hurt or angry or put out you are, so it's useful to say exactly what's going on for you - making the situation appear neither better nor worse i.e. your "I" statement should be "clear".

**What Your "I" Statement Isn't**

Your "I" statement is not about being polite. It's not to do with "soft" or "nice", nor should it be rude. It's about being clear. It's a conversation opener, not the resolution. It's the opener to improving rather than deteriorating relationships.

If you expect it to be the answer and to fix what's not working straight away - you may have an unrealistic expectation. If you expect the other person to respond, as you want them to immediately, you may have an unrealistic expectation.

What you can realistically expect is that an appropriate "I" statement made with good intent

- Is highly unlikely to do any harm
- Is a step in the right direction
- Is sure to change the current situation in some way
- Can/will open up to possibilities you may not yet see.

Sometimes the situation may not look any different yet after a clean, clear "I" statement it often feels different, and that on its own can change things. **Here's an example:**

Nan was upset when she heard her adult son, Tommy, had visited town and not bothered to call or see her. They seemed to be growing further apart, and she had been brooding over this. She did not want to appear to nag him, or say anything to make things worse. She did want to see him when he came to town.

When next they spoke, instead of putting on her "pretending not to be hurt" voice, she prepared herself for the conversation with a well rehearsed "I" statement. She got it "clear" and "clean". She was very sure she wanted a conversation that would be different from all those times she hinted at the problem without really saying it.

"When I miss out on seeing you I feel hurt and what I'd like is to have contact with you when you are in town."

She said it. Tommy immediately reacted with "You're always going at me with the same old thing."
But Nan had a clear intention. "No", she said. "This time I said something different. I was simply telling you how I feel."

For the first time on this issue, he really heard her. There was a moment's silence. Then instead of getting defensive (his usual pattern) he said "Well, actually I've tried to phone a few times. You weren't home." She acknowledged that was so. She felt much better and they then went on to have the best conversation in ages.

The next time someone shouts at you and you don't like it; resist the temptation to withdraw rapidly (maybe slamming the door on the way out). Resist the temptation to shout back to stop the onslaught, and deal with your own rising anger.

This is the time for APPROPRIATE ASSERTIVENESS. Take a deep breath. Stay centered, feet firmly planted on the ground, and get your mind into "I" statement gear. Start mixing a three-ingredient recipe:

- When... I hear a voice raised at me
- I feel... humiliated
- And what I'd like is that I... can debate an issue with you without ending up feeling hurt.

The best "I" statement is free of expectations. It is delivering a clean, clear statement of how it is from your side and how you would like it to be.