I messages

Sometimes situations can leave us feeling frustrated, upset and annoyed.

**Handout 8.1**

 I messages communicate your feelings in a calm way.

I messages can be used with other professionals or with children and young people

I messages are usually phrased:

When you …………………………….behave in a certain way

I feel……………………………………label a feeling

Because…………………………………explain the reason you feel this way

I would like…………………………say what you would like the person to do instead

When you lie to me I feel sad because it destroys the trust between us. I would like you to tell me truth.

I messages are more effective than you messages, which tend to blame and accuse

‘You never show me any respect’

**I message scenarios** :

**Handout 8.2**

1. You tell Bernice that she must not go in to the local bar. You discover that she has been there on several occasions and hasn’t told you.
2. You discover that Munir has taken your credit card and used it to buy something on the internet.
3. Social worker didn’t share a vital piece of information about a young person new in placement with you
4. Maya has cooked her own meal and cleaned up after herself
5. Andrea is never rude, but she retires up to her room whenever she comes home. She comes down for meals but seldom talks to you. She gives one-word answers if you ask her anything.
6. Matthew has written a poem for a national competition. He has just heard that is it going to be published.
7. Rebecca agreed to come home at 10 pm but she does not get back until gone midnight.
8. Lisa talks back at you rudely when you tell her that she needs to clear up the dishes in the kitchen.
9. Youth club worker bans only your young person after a fight between two young people in the youth club
10. Dan has taken the rubbish out without being asked
11. Social worker has arranged a review without checking that you are free first.
12. Tim has left uneaten food in his room, along with a growing pile of rather dirty and smelly clothes. You have been trying to encourage him to tidy up and you have reminded him again and again. He promised he would do it this morning but he went out to see his friends instead.
13. You hear two of your foster children saying really hurtful things to each other.
14. You discover Shakira has been in to your bedroom and taken some make-up from your drawers.

**Giving Poor Instructions**

We spend a lot of time giving orders and instructions to our young people. On

average we give 17 instructions each half-hour. This increases to around 40 instructions when we have a young person with behavioural problems.

Within the ABC framework, instructions are the antecedents or triggers. They come before the behaviour. Research shows that the way we give instructions can have a very direct impact on a young person’s behaviour.

SOME EXAMPLES OF POOR INSTRUCTIONS:

**Handout 8.3**

**Chain instructions:** This is a series of instructions. It tends to overload a young person with too many things to do, and it is also difficult to reinforce. Do you reward early on, or do you wait for the young person to comply with the very last instruction? If so, a young person may never actually succeed in getting that far.

**Vague instructions:** like ‘be careful’: These don’t specify exactly what

behaviour we are referring to and so a young person may not be clear what we

want. Hold on with both hands! makes it clear what theyoung person actually needs to do.

**Question instructions:** *Will you be quiet?*  These are phrased like a

question, but the adult is actually wanting compliance.

**Let’s… instructions**: *Let’s wash up*. A young person can feel tricked if the adult

has no intention of helping.

**Instructions plus rationale:** *Tidy up,* *because I’m feeling really stressed with*

*your messy room*. This has no impact. Put it the other way round – rationale and then command: *I’m feeling very* *stressed by the mess in your room. I* *want you to tidy it up.*

**Avoid repeating instructions:** as if you expect young person to ignore them. If you give a command, you must be prepared to see it through.

**Poor body language:** Sometimes our communication is weak, indirect and

ineffectual. We fail to use our bodies, face or tone of voice to convey that we are serious.

Poor instructions 2

**Handout 8.4**

Blaming and accusing ……. You did it again! You put oil in the pan, turned the burner on high and left the room. What’s wrong with you?

Name calling ………How could you forget your brand new bike? That was just plain stupid. I can ‘t believe you could be so irresponsible!

Threats …….If you don’t think it’s important enough to do your chores, then I don’t think it’s important enough to give you your allowance.

Orders…….I want you to turn off the TV and start your homework. Stop stalling. Do it *now!*

Lecturing and moralising……There’s something we need to talk about. It’s your burping at the table. It may be a joke to you but the fact is, it’s just bad manners. And whether we like it or not, people judge us by our manners. So if you must burp, at least cover your mouth and say excuse me.

Warnings……I’m warning you. If you start hanging out with that crowd, you’re headed for big trouble.

Martyrdom……I ask you to do one little thing for me and it’s too much for you. I don’t understand it. I work so hard to give you everything you need, and this is the thanks I get.

Comparisons……There’s a reason Dawn gets all the phone calls. Maybe if you made more of an effort to be friendly and outgoing the way she does, you’d be popular too.

Sarcasm….So you plan to go straight from basketball practice to the dance without showering. Well, you ought to smell wonderful. The girls will be lining up just to get near you.

Prophecy……All you ever do is blame other people for your problems. You never take responsibility. I guarantee you , if you keep this up, your problems will only get worse and you’ll have no one to blame but yourself.

 **How to Give Good Instructions**

**Handout 8.5**

**Be specific and direct:** Get your young person’s attention – use their name, pause, get eye contact. Make sure your voice is firm, maybe slightly louder than usual, but not angry. Speak slowly. If you give your young person these cues, it will help them to understand that this is a situation that you are going to see through to its conclusion.

**Reduce number of instructions:** We give a lot of unnecessary instructions.Don’t give an instruction unless you have to.

**Be clear:** *Just a minute* is vague and unhelpful. Instead, you could say wait 5 minutes and I’ll come and help you with that. This is much more informative, and gives a clear commitment to the young person.

**“Do” instructions:** *Speak more quietly/lower your voice.* The action verb goes first. This is a clear way of communicating, and tells the young person what is expected. Use “do” instructions rather than “stop” instructions … *Stop shouting*.

**Polite instructions:** we easily communicate frustration and criticism by our tone of voice. Most of us respond adversely to sarcasm, putdowns and annoyance. *Stop complaining for once in your life* conveys irritation andannoyance. *Your bike’s in the yard* is aninstruction dressed up as a description. Itimplies criticism. Young people are less likely tocomply if they sense hostility and criticism.

**One instruction at a time:** Allow time to comply. Give the young person about five seconds to respond, before taking the next step.

**Warnings and reminders:** These help young people make the transition between one activity and another. If your young person is engrossed in an activity or TV, give them a warning that you are going to ask them to do something. *When this programme* *finishes I want you to switch off the TV and…*

**When… then:** *When you finish your homework then you can go on the X box.* This way ofcommunicating informs the young person of the exactconsequences of their behaviour: Appropriate behaviour will lead to a positive reward. This contrasts starkly with the general vague threat –*if you don’t get on with it, you are going to get into trouble*.

**Give options:** *You may not watch TV but you can do some cooking with me.* Instructions which prohibitshould include suggestions for alternativeactivities.

**Short instructions**: Keep your instructions simple – don’t get caught up in explanations. You must follow through your instruction with **praise** or **consequences.** So only give an instruction if you are prepared to see it through, however long it takes.

How to Engage Teenager’s Cooperation

**Handout 8.6**

Instead of ordering (‘Turn that music down and I mean *now!’*) you can:

Describe the problem: ‘I can’t think or have a conversation when the music is blasting.’

Describe what you feel: ‘It hurts my ears.’

Give information: ‘Frequent exposure to loud sound can damage a person’s hearing.’

Offer a choice: ‘What would you rather do – turn the volume way down or lower it a little and close your door?’

Say it in a word: ‘The volume!’

State your values and/or expectations: ‘We all need to tune in to each other’s tolerance for loud music.’

Do the unexpected: Place your hands over your eyes, make a motion of turning the volume down, place palms together, and bow in a gesture of gratitude.

Put it in writing: Music this loud

 May be cool for a crowd

 But for just me and you

 It is much too, too

 LOUD!!!

Taken from : How To Talk so Teens Will Listen and Listen so Teens Will Talk, Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish, Picadilly Press 2006, p65

**SELECTIVE IGNORING**

**Handout 8.7**

Selective Ignoring involves the systematic withdrawal of attention for selected inappropriate behaviours. It can be a remarkably effective disciplinary strategy.

● You cannot ignore potentially dangerous behaviours, but many minor, annoying behaviours like swearing, moaning and backchat can be ignored.

● **You may feel that you should be actively dealing with young people’s “misbehaviour”. To ignore it can feel like a “cop-out”.**

● *Ignoring requires a degree of self-control. This can be very difficult if you are feeling angry and wound up. You will need to hold on to your own negative feelings.*

● **Ignoring can ultimately be a very effective way to dissipate your frustrations. It enables you to model for the young person self-control in the face of provocation.**

Ignoring involves:

* **No eye contact**/non-verbal communication with the young person;
* No speech;
* **No physical contact** – turn your body away from a young person
* ***Be subtle****:* Be neutral, not dramatic.

***Be explicit:*** Tell your young person what behaviour you want to see and what you find unacceptable. Explain that you are going to ignore inappropriate behaviour and give attention to appropriate behaviour. *When you* *shout, I will turn away and say nothing, but* *when you ask me politely, I will listen to your request*. The idea is that you help your young person to learn that it is beneficial to behave in appropriate ways.

***Be consistent:***If you are ignoring a young person when they backchat, make sure you stick to this each time it happens.

***Always combine ignoring with attending and rewarding:* Praise as soon as possible.**

***Check that others are ignoring****:* Make sure there is not some kind of pay-off from others in the household.

***Avoid ignoring good behaviour.*** As soon as the undesirable behavior stops, notice and give positive attention or labelled praise to a desirable behavior.

***Avoid ignoring for long periods:***Ignoring should only be done for short periods of time – usually for seconds or minutes, while the behavior is occurring. Remember you are ignoring the behavior and not the young person. Limit the number of behaviours you are going to ignore at one time.

*Avoid ignoring a behaviour you find really upsetting: You may end up exploding or being inconsistent.*

**Advantages of ignoring**

* There is no pay-off for inappropriate behavior.
* **It maintains a positive relationship between you and your young person.**

**It avoids yelling, shouting, criticising, etc.**

**Home Practice: I Messages**

**Handout 8.8**

Think of at least one well-thought-out I message during the week. You can use I messages with either adults or young people

Remember how to phrase it:

‘When you … I feel … because …I would like’

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| **Situation** |  **I message:****what I said and did** | **Observation** |
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Handout 8.9

**Home Practice: Giving Calm, Clear Instructions**

**Handout 8.9**

**The behaviour I want to focus on this week is:**

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| **Day of the week** | **What I did (instruction given)** | **Outcome** |
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Handout 8.10

**Home Practice: Ignoring**

**Handout 8.10**

**The behaviour I want to ignore this week is:** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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| **Day of the week** | **Record what happened, what I did, what the outcome was.** |
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**As soon as your young person behaves in an appropriate way, praise or make a positive comment**