



Affective Center for Therapy

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FOUR WAYS TO COMMUNICATE

If you want to improve your communication skills, think of a continuum where, at the far left, it is all about the other person; it is **your** judgments, beliefs and expectations of others. On the far right, it is all about you; how you are feeling, what your expectations are and about your conclusions. It is about yourself and **your** world. The far right is an internal report of what is going on inside of you.

There are four ways of communicating depending upon what part of the continuum you choose to come from. Where you choose to come from will be determined by what you want to accomplish.

1. **You Are** messages:

At the far left of the continuum are the **You Are messages**. This is where you would try to control the other person and/or make yourself feel better by the use of put downs, threats, guilt trips and blame. When you use this approach, it is because you see yourself as weak and easily hurt, so you attack. Your words are judgments directed outward towards others. It is a way of diverting attention from yourself or towards yourself, "look at me". Directing your words at others is a way of attacking. Is a way of protecting yourself from emotional pain, manipulation and/or fear of rejection, "I will reject you before you can reject me". Your weapons of attack are the DEADLY EIGHT: Judgments, Putdowns, Threats, Guilt Trips, Sarcasm, Blame, Demands and Silence.

2. **Paraphrasing**:

To the right of the "You Are" messages is **Paraphrasing**. Like the "You Are" messages, paraphrasing is directed outward towards the other person **but** the intent is very different. Here the intent is two-fold: to better understand the person by really listening to what that person is saying and to let them know you understand them the way they want to be understood. Paraphrasing shortens angry discussions and increases the sense of self-worth in the person to whom you are listening.

To be able to paraphrase, you have to be able NOT to take what is being said as personal. As soon as you take what is said as saying something about you, you will stop listening and start attacking and defending yourself, going back to the "You Are" messages. (If you are having trouble doing this, re-read the discussions on the To Me rule and How to Never Get Your Feelings Hurt from past blogs.)

3. Empathy:

To the right of Paraphrasing is **Empathy**. Empathy is about you; it is *your emotional response* to what the other person has told you. The intent of empathy is to let the other person know that they are not crazy and also letting them know that you have had similar feelings. Empathy is not sympathy. Sympathy says, "You poor dear, I feel sorry for you." Empathy says, "I can understand and accept you because I have had a similar experience/feelings." It might sound like, "No wonder you are angry. If that had happened to me, I would have been furious."

Empathy is the ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes and feel what they must be feeling. One way to do that is to say to yourself, "What would I be feeling if I had said that?"

YOU ARE _____ PARAPHRASING _____ EMPATHY _____ I AM _____

4. I Am messages:

You will notice as you have gone across the continuum that it becomes about you more and more. In fact, **I Am** messages are all about you. *I Am* messages are important if you want to be loved and feel accepted. When you use I AM messages, you must be willing to be open and vulnerable.

I Am messages are internal reports: "I am feeling . . ." "**I am** not feeling loved or cared about; you may love me very much but I'm not feeling loved. Sometimes I think it is because **I am** afraid to let your love in." Here is still another, "**I am** confused when what you say and what you do, do not match up. When that happens, I don't feel loved or cared about." *I Am* messages are never about the other person or what they should do or how they have to change. It is about where you are. It is NOT about laying guilt on someone or trying to manipulate someone to do what you want. If the other person chooses to change because they care about your feelings, so much the better. But, don't expect them to change. That would come across as manipulation. You might want to add, "I sharing my feelings as a way of changing my feelings, NOT as a way to get you to change. If fact, if you change now, I would feel guilty."

The verbal rule says, **Feelings expressed verbally, as strongly as they are felt, will take place, reduce in intensity and are free to change.**

Now you know four ways to communicate with someone. The correct way will depend upon what you want to achieve. Just remember, *You Are* messages tend to drive people away from you; *I Am* messages tend to allow others to know you and get closer to you.

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