

I Feel Statements - Part 2

The Power of "I Feel" Statements

"I feel" statements are a powerful way to communicate emotions. They help you express yourself clearly without blame, but if misused, they can unintentionally manipulate others. In Part One, we learned how "I feel" statements allow us to share emotions while letting go of blame. In this part, we'll explore how to use them more assertively while staying mindful of the line between assertiveness and manipulation.

When we are assertive, there is always a balance to maintain. People close to us can be more influenced by our emotions, so our intentions matter greatly.

Example: A High School Student

Sarah, an Asian American high school student, shared with me: *"I am so stressed at school. I have to get into a good college."* As I explored this further with her, she revealed painful beliefs: *"My parents expect me to get into a good college. My parents only love me because I do well in school. My parents don't really love me."* She wept as she described feeling unloved and lonely.

We worked together on coping strategies, but she admitted: *"In the back of my mind I know it is true—they only care about my grades. I would only really know if they told me they love me. But they never do."* I suggested learning communication skills so she could express this directly to her parents.

When her parents joined, Sarah bravely said: *"I love you two so much. I know grades are really important to you, so I try my best to make you proud. But I feel unloved and alone because I've been telling myself that you don't love me—that you only care about grades."* With tears in their eyes, her parents reassured her: *"That is so far from the truth! We care about you very much. We care about grades only because we want you to have opportunities we never had."*

Sarah then tried another version of the "I feel" statement: *"I would feel loved if you told me that you love me."* Her parents openly said: *"Sarah, we love you so very much."* Sarah left feeling reassured and more connected.

This story highlights the difference between the **two kinds of "I feel" statements**:

- Sharing your current emotions.
- Expressing how you *would* feel if someone acted in a certain way.

Positive vs. Negative Emotions

- **“I would feel (positive emotion) if you...”**
→ This shares with someone how their action could bring about a positive feeling.
Example: *“I would feel cared for if you checked in on me when I’m stressed.”*
- **“I would feel (negative emotion) if you...”**
→ This communicates how an action could hurt or negatively affect you.
Example: *“I would feel hurt if you ignored me when I’m talking.”*

Assertiveness vs. Manipulation

Manipulation is defined as *“controlling or influencing a person or situation cleverly, unfairly, or unscrupulously.”* The word **“unfair”** is key, and it can be subjective. That’s why intention matters.

- If your goal is to control others without their consent, that can be manipulative.
- If your goal is to communicate honestly, it is assertive.

Factors like **safety** and **age** also play a role. For example, when someone’s well-being is at risk, prioritizing safety may justify stronger influence. Likewise, parents teaching children how their behavior affects others is part of healthy guidance.

Example:

- **Frustrated Traveler:** A woman angry about a 30-minute flight delay says to the airline rep: *“I would feel happy if you reimbursed my ticket and let me fly for free.”* This leans toward manipulation because her statement is not about expressing emotion, but about pressuring the representative to change their behavior for her personal benefit.
- **High standard student :** A student who studied very hard for his math test says to the teacher: *“I would be sad if I didn’t get a good grade on this test because I care a lot about this class and studied very hard.”* In this situation if the student is sharing their emotion because they want the teacher to give them a good grade it is manipulative. If they are wanting to share their emotions and let the teacher know what is coming up for them it is not manipulative.
- **Teaching a Child:** Imagine a 6-year-old boy who has gotten into the habit of hitting when he feels upset. A parent might say: *“I would feel sad and hurt if you hit me, because I don’t like being hurt and I want to feel safe when we play*

together.” This example is assertive because it teaches the child how their behavior affects others, while still guiding them toward healthier choices.

“I feel” statements are simple but powerful tools for deepening connection and expressing needs without blame. They can share our present emotions or describe how someone’s actions could make us feel. The difference between assertiveness and manipulation lies in intention. Used with honesty and care, “I feel” statements build trust, safety, and understanding. When used to unfairly control others, they can damage relationships. The goal is not to get others to always meet our requests, but to give them the opportunity to better understand us—and, when possible, to grow closer through healthier communication.