

I Feel Statements - Part 1

The Power of “I Feel” Statements

“I feel” statements are one of the most powerful communication tools within the **5 Secrets of Effective Communication**, a model created by Dr. David D. Burns. These statements help us express emotions in ways that invite understanding rather than arguments. When used with honesty, they nurture closeness, empathy, and trust.

“I feel” statements are powerful because they reveal how you experience the world. They invite vulnerability, the foundation of emotional intimacy and help others see your inner experience more clearly. At times, they can even influence another person’s behavior, simply because understanding how you feel can inspire care and cooperation.

However, it’s important to be mindful of your intentions. When used sincerely, “I feel” statements foster connection and compassion. But if used to pressure or control, they can become manipulative. The key is to speak from a place of honesty and kindness, so that your words create understanding, not obligation.

Example: A Late Dinner Date

Imagine you’re on a date with your significant other.

You both agreed to meet at **6:00 p.m.** You arrive on time, but they are nowhere to be seen. You call and text, but there’s no response. By **6:30**, you’re frustrated and ready to leave when they finally arrive and say casually, “I’m so hungry, let’s eat!” They explain they had to stay late for a meeting, as if being late were no big deal.

This is a perfect opportunity to practice using “I feel” statements.

Five Types of “I Feel” Statements

Below are five common ways people use “I feel” statements. Some are more effective than others.

1. “I feel like...”

- **Pros:** Sometimes it feels natural or familiar to say.
- **Cons:** “I feel like” is *not* an actual feeling statement. It’s usually followed by a thought, judgement or opinion (e.g., “I feel like you’re disrespectful”), which can make others defensive and upset.

Example: “I feel like you are disrespectful because you’re late.”

2. “I feel (emotion)”

- **Pros:** A simple and clear way to express emotion when unsure how to explain it. Most people can relate to basic feelings like *sad, angry, worried, or excited*.
- **Cons:** The listener may not fully understand *why* you feel that way.

Example: “I feel upset and worried.”

3. “I feel (emotion) because you...”

- **Pros:** Let the other person know what they did that led to your emotion. This can promote awareness and change.
- **Cons:** The listener might feel blamed and become defensive.

Example: “I feel upset because you were late to our date.”

4. “I feel (emotion) because we...”

- **Pros:** Reduces blame by showing shared responsibility. It emphasizes teamwork rather than fault.
- **Cons:** The other person might still feel accused or not fully understand their role.

Example: “I feel upset and worried because we agreed to meet at 6 p.m. and it’s now 6:30.”

5. “I feel (emotion) because I...”

- **Pros:** Shows full ownership of your emotions. It’s highly vulnerable, helps others feel safe, and invites connection. It communicates that you are responsible for how you feel.
- **Cons:** Can feel uncomfortable because it requires openness and self-reflection.

Example: “I feel upset and worried because I have a hard time sitting alone at restaurants, and my mind starts imagining what could have happened to you.”

Choosing the Right Statement

Which type of “I feel” statement is best? It depends on your intention and the situation.

In the earlier example, if you say:

“I feel upset because you were late to our date,”
your partner might come earlier next time mainly out of worry that you’ll be upset again.

But if you say instead:

“I feel upset and worried because I have a hard time sitting alone at restaurants, and my mind starts imagining what could have happened to you,”
your partner may come earlier next time because they *care* about you and don’t want you to feel distressed. In this case, “**I feel (emotion) because I...**” works best because it invites empathy and understanding rather than fear or guilt.

Now, imagine a different scenario. Your partner does something thoughtful like surprising you with your favorite cup of coffee. You could say:

“I feel happy because I won’t be tired all day,”
or
“I feel happy because you went out of your way to get it for me.”

The second version celebrates their kindness and effort, deepening warmth and appreciation. In this type of situation, “**I feel (emotion) because you...**” is often the most connecting choice.

General Guideline

- Use “**I feel (emotion) because you...**” for *positive* emotions directed toward others.
- Use “**I feel (emotion) because I...**” for *negative* emotions to reduce blame.
- Use “**I feel (emotion) because we...**” to emphasize teamwork and shared experience.

“I feel” statements may seem simple, but their impact is profound. They remind us that true communication is not about winning an argument—it’s about being seen and understood. By expressing emotions honestly and taking responsibility for our feelings, we create space for compassion and understanding to grow.

When we use “I feel” statements with care, we move from blame to connection, from defensiveness to openness. The goal is not to make others change, but to invite them into a deeper, more authentic relationship where both people feel safe, valued, and heard.