

“I Messages” Work in Good Times and in Bad

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Back in the 1980's I learned about “I Messages”. I was taught that when communicating with someone about something that bothers us, instead of laying blame, it was more effective to speak about how it made us feel. So instead of saying,

“You are always so rude to me!” I could instead say, “I feel hurt when you speak rudely to me”. I was pleasantly surprised when I began giving parenting workshops that the curriculum made use of these “I messages” in progressive ways.

One of the ways we can reinforce positive behavior in our children is to recognize the good behavioral decisions they make. We can do this through an “I love you” message. An example would be “I love you very much. I see that you came home and began doing your homework before I had to remind you. I feel proud when I see you becoming more responsible.” We begin our communication by telling our children we love them. We also express our feelings about their positive behavior. Our children love to receive positive feedback from us when it is

real and specific.

When our children make poor behavior decisions, this “I love you” message can be equally as effective. At the time, we need to discipline our children, it is helpful for them to understand that discipline flows from love. It can sound like, “You know that I love you very much. I was disappointed to hear that you have not been handing in your homework. Why is this happening?” Framing the conversation this way provides a better opportunity for more productive responses from our children. They realize we are concerned because we love them. This also helps them understand our feelings about the situation. Speaking from love also helps keep our emotions in check while we get to the bottom of what’s going on.

Everything we do or say provides examples for our children to follow. When we speak from love, when we communicate from the perspective of how we feel, our children will learn to do the same. Over time, these communication patterns can profoundly change the way we talk to each other at home. They will also affect how our children will communicate outside of home with their peers and other adults. This way of communicating will support effective problem-solving at school.

Sometimes we just need to take a deep breath and remember why we are parents. When we do that the love will flow and our communication will be more effective.

With love and affection,

Rosemarie

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