

Using “I” statements to build team trust

After this huddle, staff should be able to:

- **Identify** the structure of a genuine “I” statement.
- **Demonstrate** how to shift from blaming “you” statements to respectful “I” statements that demonstrate feelings and experiences.
- **Have resources ready**, such as policies, employee assistance programs, or SafeCare BC resources.
- **Choose a scenario** that fits your workplace and read it aloud.
- **Use the guiding questions** to lead the discussion.
- **Use huddle leader notes** as support while leading the discussion.
- **Keep the discussion short** to about 5-10 minutes.

How to run the safety huddle

As the huddle leader, do the following:

- **Before the huddle**, review the huddle content and huddle leader notes.



Definitions

An “I” statement is a communication tool that shifts the focus from what someone else did “wrong” to how you are personally experiencing a situation. By removing blame from the equation, you reduce the chance that the other person will become defensive, making it easier for them to hear what you are saying. It is a practical skill used to build connections and reduce friction, especially in high-stress environments or situations.

Using “I” statements

“I” statements follow a simple structure. They state how you feel about a specific event or situation, followed by the request you would like to make.

“I feel **[emotion]** when **[specific behaviour or situation]** because **[impact]**. I need **[specific request]**.”

Example:

“I feel **[stressed]** when **[I’m managing multiple residents on my own]** because **[it affects our residents getting breakfast on time]**. I need **[your help with the remaining residents]**.”

Scenario for long-term care

Fatima is a care aide at a busy long-term care home. She is currently working a short-staffed morning shift and has successfully helped several residents get ready for breakfast. However, her colleague, who was supposed to help with the remaining residents, has been scrolling on their phone at the nursing station for the last ten minutes. Fatima feels her stress levels rising as the breakfast bell rings. She is tempted to walk over and snap, “You are being so lazy and inconsiderate while I’m doing all the work!” She knows this will likely start an argument, so she pauses to consider how to use an “I” statement to address the situation.

Guiding questions for long-term care

- How do you expect the other person to react to the “you” version of Fatima’s comment (calling her colleague lazy and

inconsiderate).

- Using the “I feel... when... because...” structure, how could Fatima rephrase her concern?
- Why is it important for Fatima to focus on her own experience of the workload rather than judging her colleague’s character?



Scenario for home care

Jessica is a home health support worker who drives between several clients each day. Her schedule is tight, and she relies on the staff from the previous shift to leave accurate, timely notes in the mobile app, so she knows exactly what her clients need when she arrives. For the third time this week, her colleague on the previous shift has not updated the notes, leaving Jessica feeling unprepared and anxious as she enters a client’s home. When Jessica sees this colleague at the end of the day, she wants to say, “You are so disorganized. You’re making my job impossible because you never do your paperwork!” She stops herself, realizing that this approach is full of accusations and blaming. Her colleague will likely get defensive, and this approach won’t effectively solve the issue.

Guiding questions for home care

- What is the judgment Jessica is making about her colleague in the first version of her comment?
- If Jessica starts with “I feel unprepared when I don’t have the morning notes,” how might that change the colleague’s reaction?
- In a role where you don’t see your teammates often, why is blame-free communication so important for staying connected?

Huddle leader notes

1. Create a safe space:

- Listen, respect all views, and be mindful of others’ challenges.
- Guide the discussion to focus on what participants can control.
- Move the conversation from complaints to solutions, strengths, and helpful actions.
- Invite anyone with specific concerns to talk with you after the huddle.

2. Key discussion points: Use the objectives and key discussion points below to guide the huddle if needed.

- **The blame game:** Starting with “You...” often sounds like an accusation, which causes people to go quiet or protect themselves.
- **The “I” formula:** A strong “I” statement often follows a simple pattern: “I feel [emotion] when [action] because [impact]”.

- **Avoid fake I statements:** Saying “I feel that you are being selfish” is still a judgment disguised as an “I” statement.
- **Practical phrases:** Encourage staff to use openers like “I notice...”, “I’m concerned that...”, or “I would prefer...”
- **Impact on safety:** Clear, respectful communication helps people feel safe enough to ask questions or admit mistakes.

Additional resources

SafeCare BC | *Words Matter*: This info sheet offers four practical tool you can use to help build health workplace relationships.

SafeCare BC | *Using “I” statements*: Learn how to use “I” statements to manage your own stress response and reduce internal conflict, fostering a sense of calm during challenging discussions.



