

HOW TO SAY WHAT I FEEL WITHOUT FIGHTING OR SHUTTING DOWN

Introduction

Expressing your feelings honestly while avoiding conflict or withdrawal can be challenging. This worksheet will help you develop skills to communicate your emotions effectively, maintain healthy connections with others, and stay true to yourself—even in difficult conversations.

ACTIVITY 1: Understanding Your Communication Patterns

Instructions: Think about how you typically respond when faced with emotional conversations. Check the boxes that apply to you.

When faced with difficult conversations, I tend to:

- Get defensive and argue
 - Raise my voice
 - Use blame statements ("You always..." "You never...")
 - Interrupt frequently
 - Make assumptions about others' intentions
 - Withdraw and stop talking
 - Say "I'm fine" when I'm not
 - Give the silent treatment
 - Avoid the conversation entirely
 - Change the subject
 - Agree just to end the discussion
 - Get physically uncomfortable (stomach ache, headache)
 - Cry
 - Struggle to find the right words
 - Forget what I wanted to say

Reflection Questions:

1. Do you tend more toward fighting (arguments, defensiveness) or shutting down (withdrawing, avoiding)?
 2. What triggers these responses in you?
 3. How have these patterns affected your relationships?
 4. What would improve if you could communicate differently?
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ACTIVITY 2: Emotion Vocabulary Building

Instructions: Expanding your emotional vocabulary helps you express yourself more precisely. Circle the emotions you experience regularly but find difficult to express.

Anger Family: Frustrated | Irritated | Annoyed | Resentful | Bitter | Indignant | Outraged | Enraged | Irate | Exasperated

Fear Family: Anxious | Nervous | Worried | Concerned | Uneasy | Apprehensive | Frightened | Terrified | Suspicious | Insecure

Sadness Family: Disappointed | Discouraged | Hopeless | Gloomy | Lonely | Heartbroken | Grief-stricken | Melancholy | Regretful | Dejected

Joy Family: Content | Pleased | Satisfied | Delighted | Thrilled | Elated | Jubilant | Ecstatic | Proud | Grateful

Shame Family: Embarrassed | Humiliated | Self-conscious | Guilty | Remorseful | Inadequate | Ridiculous | Mortified | Foolish | Regretful

Practice: Write three sentences expressing emotions you typically find difficult to communicate:

1. "I feel _____ when _____ because _____."
 2. "I feel _____ when _____ because _____."
 3. "I feel _____ when _____ because _____."
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ACTIVITY 3: Body Awareness Check-In

Instructions: Our bodies often signal emotions before we consciously recognize them. Understanding these signals can help you address feelings before they overwhelm you.

Where do you typically feel these emotions in your body?

Anger: Tight jaw

Clenched fists

Hot face

Tense shoulders

Racing heart

Other: _____

Anxiety/Fear: Stomach butterflies

Tight chest

Shallow breathing

Sweaty palms

Shaky voice

Other: _____

Sadness: Heaviness in chest

Lump in throat

Teary eyes

Low energy

Slumped posture

Other: _____

Shame: Wanting to disappear

Looking down

Flushed face

Shrinking posture

Nausea

Other: _____

My Personal Early Warning Signs:

List the first 3 body signals that typically appear when you're getting emotional:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

When I notice these signals, I can: Take a deep breath

Drink some water

Ask for a short break

Name what I'm feeling to myself

Other: _____

ACTIVITY 4: The PAUSE Method

Instructions: Practice this method before responding in emotional situations.

P - Pause Take a breath. Count to 5. Step back mentally.

A - Acknowledge Notice and name your feelings to yourself. "I'm noticing I feel..."

U - Understand Ask yourself: "Why am I feeling this way? What need of mine isn't being met?"

S - Select Choose your words carefully before speaking.

E - Express Share your feelings and needs clearly using "I" statements.

Practice Scenarios:

Scenario 1: Your friend cancels plans at the last minute for the third time in a row.

- Pause: Take a deep breath
- Acknowledge: "I'm feeling disappointed and somewhat disrespected."
- Understand: "I value reliability and quality time with friends."
- Select: Consider how to express this without attacking.
- Express: Write what you might say:

Scenario 2: Someone interrupts you repeatedly during a conversation.

- Pause: (What would you do to pause?)
- Acknowledge: "I'm feeling..."
- Understand: "This matters to me because..."
- Select: (How would you choose to respond?)
- Express: Write what you might say:

Scenario 3: Write your own scenario:

- Apply the PAUSE method to this situation:

ACTIVITY 5: "I" Statement Formula Practice

Instructions: "I" statements help communicate feelings without blaming others.

Basic Formula: "I feel _____ when _____ because _____. What I need/would like is _____."

Example: Instead of: "You never listen to me! You're always on your phone!" Try: "I feel ignored when we're talking and you look at your phone because it seems like what I'm saying isn't important to you. I would like your full attention during our conversations."

Practice transforming these blaming statements into "I" statements:

1. "You're always late! You don't respect my time at all." "I feel _____ when _____ because _____. What I need is _____"

- _____."
2. "You never help around the house. You're so lazy." "I feel _____ when _____ because _____. What I need is _____."
 3. "You embarrassed me in front of everyone! Why would you say that?" "I feel _____ when _____ because _____. What I need is _____."
 4. Create your own blaming statement that you might use when upset:
"_____"
- Now transform it: "I feel _____ when _____ because _____." What I need is _____."
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ACTIVITY 6: Active Listening Skills

Instructions: Communication is two-way. When you listen well, others are more likely to listen to you.

Rate your current listening habits (1=Never, 5=Always): ___ I make eye contact when others are speaking ___ I avoid interrupting ___ I put away distractions (phone, etc.) ___ I ask clarifying questions ___ I reflect back what I heard ___ I validate others' feelings even when I disagree

Choose 2 listening skills to practice this week:

1. _____
2. _____

Reflective Listening Phrases to Practice:

- "What I hear you saying is..."
- "It sounds like you feel..."
- "So from your perspective..."
- "I want to make sure I understand. You're saying..."

Practice with a partner: Take turns discussing a mildly challenging topic for 2 minutes each. The listener can only ask questions and reflect back what they heard. No advice, no disagreeing, no sharing your own experience.

Reflection: How did it feel to be truly listened to?

How did focusing on listening change how you might respond?

ACTIVITY 7: Emotional Temperature Check

Instructions: Use this scale to monitor your emotional intensity during conversations.

1-10 Emotional Temperature Scale: 1-3: Calm, centered, can communicate clearly 4-6: Feeling emotional but still thinking clearly 7-8: Emotions are strong, thinking becoming clouded 9-10: Very intense, difficult to think clearly or communicate effectively

When my temperature rises to 7 or above, I will: Ask for a time-out: "I need a few minutes to collect my thoughts." Take deep breaths Step outside or move to another room briefly Write down what I'm feeling Use a calming phrase: "This is important, and I want to discuss it when I can think clearly." Other: _____

My personal signs that I'm reaching a 7 or 8:

Cooling Down Strategies that work for me:

ACTIVITY 8: Difficult Conversation Planning

Instructions: Plan an approach for a real conversation you need to have.

The conversation I need to have is with: _____

What I want to express:

My goal for this conversation:

Their possible perspective/feelings:

Potential challenges/hot spots:

Opening statement: "I'd like to talk about _____. Is this a good time?"

My key points using "I" statements:

1. "I feel _____ when _____ because _____."
2. "I need/would like _____."

Questions I could ask to understand their perspective:

If the conversation gets heated, I will:

Best time/place for this conversation:

ACTIVITY 9: Common Communication Pitfalls

Instructions: Check the communication pitfalls you sometimes fall into and practice alternatives.

- Mind Reading** Assuming you know what others think or feel without asking *Alternative:* "I'm not sure what you're thinking about this. Could you share your perspective?"
- All-or-Nothing Language** Using words like "always," "never," "everyone," "no one" *Alternative:* Use specific examples: "The last few times we talked about this..."
- Bringing Up the Past** Adding old issues to current discussions *Alternative:* "Let's focus on what's happening now. We can discuss other issues later if needed."

Character Attacks Criticizing the person instead of the behavior *Alternative:* Address specific behaviors and their impact on you.

Defensiveness Responding to feedback with excuses or counter-attacks *Alternative:* "I hear you're upset about X. Help me understand more."

Stonewalling Shutting down completely *Alternative:* "I need some time to process. Can we continue this in an hour?"

Choose one pitfall you want to work on:

How it typically shows up in your communication:

Alternative approach you'll practice:

ACTIVITY 10: Self-Regulation Techniques

Instructions: Develop techniques to stay regulated during difficult conversations.

Before the Conversation: Identify your feelings and needs Set a clear intention Practice what you want to say Choose an appropriate time and place Remind yourself of your values Other: _____

During the Conversation: Breathe deeply and slowly Keep your voice at an even volume Notice your body posture Take brief pauses when needed Stay focused on the current issue Use a grounding object (something to hold) Other: _____

After the Conversation: Reflect on what went well Notice what you learned Congratulate yourself for difficult moments Process remaining feelings (journal, talk to someone) Plan follow-up if needed Other: _____

My personal regulation plan:

ACTIVITY 11: Communication Style Flexibility

Instructions: Different situations may require different approaches. Consider how to adapt your communication.

Situation	Assertive Approach	Gentle Approach	Direct Approach
With close friends			
With family members			
At school/work			
With authority figures			
In a conflict			
When setting boundaries			

Questions to consider:

1. When do you need to be more direct versus more gentle in your communication?
2. How might you adapt your communication style while still being authentic?
3. Which relationships in your life need a different communication approach?

ACTIVITY 12: Weekly Practice Journal

Instructions: Use this template to track your communication practice over the next week.

Day	Situation	How I Expressed My Feelings	What Worked Well	What I'll Try Next Time
Mon				
Tue				
Wed				
Thu				
Fri				
Sat				
Sun				

Final Reflection Questions

1. What have you learned about your communication patterns?
 2. Which new skill or technique seems most helpful for you?
 3. What do you see as the biggest barrier to expressing your feelings?
 4. How might relationships improve if you communicated differently?
 5. Which situations are still challenging for you to navigate?
 6. What support do you need to continue improving your communication?
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Remember:

- Effective communication is a skill that improves with practice
- Everyone struggles sometimes—be patient with yourself and others
- The goal isn't perfect communication but honest connection
- It's okay to make mistakes and try again
- Your feelings and needs matter, and so do those of others
- Sometimes the most powerful communication happens after listening