

I-Statements: The Key to Resolving Conflicts

Adapted from Girl Scouts of the USA's award-winning BFF (Be a Friend First) Program, this activity teaches girls how to use I-Statements to resolve conflicts and speak directly with others about their feelings—important leadership skills they can use throughout their lives!

GOALS FOR GIRLS

- Learn what I-Statements are and how to use them to resolve conflicts
- Commit to using I-Statements in their own lives

MATERIALS

- Step-by-step instructions
- Sample talking points (but feel free to use your own words!)
- Troop handout

ESTIMATED TIME: 45–60 minutes

Visit banbossy.com to download our leadership tips and activities for girls, parents, teachers, and troop leaders.



Step 1: Discuss conflict in relationships

ESTIMATED TIME: 5-7 minutes

Lead a discussion on the importance of working through conflicts in personal relationships. Before you begin, remind the girls about our guidelines for troop discussions:

1. We don't use anyone's name to avoid hurt feelings
2. What we share within the group stays within the group

You can use these questions as conversation starters:

“ Does anyone have an example of a time when you decided to let a conflict go or pretend it didn't happen? How did it feel?

Have you ever tried talking through a conflict with a friend only to have your effort backfire? How did it feel?

Have you ever shifted your point of view on a conflict—really looked at it from the other person's point of view? How did it feel? ”

Let the girls know that conflicts are inevitable in relationships. It's how we deal with conflicts that matters.

Step 2: Introduce the activity

ESTIMATED TIME: 3-5 minutes

The goal of this activity is to help girls use I-Statements to practice and work through conflicts that are common in their own lives. Take a few minutes to introduce the activity and link it back to the girls' thoughts and feelings about difficult conversations. Here's some language to use as a starting point:

“ We've all had experiences where our feelings are hurt. Perhaps you blurted out your point of view in an angry way that didn't solve the problem and made it even worse. Or maybe you kept your real feelings bottled up, which only made you feel more resentful.

Choosing to resolve a conflict usually means committing to talk through it openly. I-Statements can be a powerful tool for letting people know how you are feeling—and what you need—in a thoughtful way.

We're going to practice using I-Statements so you become more confident communicating difficult feelings—and doing it with sensitivity and respect for others. You'll see that you can speak up in a way that's powerful and respectful, instead of keeping your feelings inside or communicating in a hurtful way. ”

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Step 3: Explain how I-Statements work

ESTIMATED TIME: 5-7 minutes

Before you get started:

Distribute the attached handout to your troop or write out the formula for a good I-Statement on a large piece of paper or blackboard where the girls can see it.

Explain that a good I-Statement focuses on a specific behavior and how it affects you instead of accusing or attacking the person for who they are and how they act. Then walk them through the Formula for Good I-Statements.

Formula for Good I-Statements

When you _____ (describe a specific action that hurt you)

I feel _____ (say your feeling)

Because _____ (why the action makes you feel that way)

You can use this example to illustrate the point:

Example of I-Statements

Good

When you make fun of the way I dress, I feel hurt because your opinion is important to me.

Not-so-good

You are a jerk.

Ask the girls to explain the difference between the two statements to you.

If they don't quite see it, you may need to explain how it works:

“ In the good example, a specific behavior causes the hurt feelings. In the not-so-good example, the person is the problem and will likely feel attacked for being called a jerk and will get defensive. This will probably make the conflict worse. ”

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Make sure the girls understand the difference between talking about a behavior versus talking about a person's character. Then spend a few minutes talking about how it feels to be on the receiving end of comments like the second one—and why starting with what feels like an attack doesn't work very well.

Step 4: Have the girls identify potential conflicts in their own lives

ESTIMATED TIME: 10–15 minutes

Before you get started:

1. If the girls have a hard time brainstorming possible conflicts, or if you're concerned about time, you'll find several scenarios developed for our BFF program at www.girlscouts.org/ban-bossy/I-Statements.pdf.
2. You can have the girls write down possible conflicts on a piece of paper, or if you're using the attached handout, there's space for them there.

Depending on how many girls are participating, ask them to break into pairs or small groups and work together to come up with a list of conflicts they might encounter at home, at school, or in their community.

Once everyone is ready, have each team read their scenarios to the larger group. Then work with the girls to identify the two to four most common conflicts across the troop, and write them down where everyone can see them. (There's also space for the girls to write them down on the activity handout.)

ANOTHER I-STATEMENT EXAMPLE:

Good

When you make plans for us without asking me what I want to do, I feel like you don't value my opinions.

Not-so-good

You only think about yourself.

The not-so-good example implies the speaker's friend only has selfish traits. This likely isn't true and will hurt her feelings. It would be more accurate and effective to use the good example.

QUICK TIP:

Remind the girls to avoid using anyone's name so feelings aren't hurt.

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Step 5: Have the girls brainstorm I-Statements for their conflicts

ESTIMATED TIME: 15-20 minutes

Before you get started:

In addition to the conflicts you brainstormed with your troop, we recommend the “Ban Bossy scenario” in the call-out box below.

Work with the girls to brainstorm a few good I-Statements for each type of conflict. Let them take the lead, but make sure they follow the formula. Look for opportunities to talk with them about what’s working (and why) and what’s not working (and why).

Write down the group’s favorite I-Statement for each scenario (or have them do it on their handouts).

QUICK TIP:

Acknowledge that it’s not always easy to speak up, but it’s worth it! You might need to coach them a bit until they get the hang of it. While you’re coaching them, ask the girls to consider different possible reactions to an I-Statement. When and where might I-Statements work better (or worse)? How can they set up their conversations so they succeed?

BAN BOSSY SCENARIO: PRACTICE RESPONDING TO “BOSSY”

Have the girls imagine this situation: You are working on a history project with a group in your class. You feel frustrated that the group keeps talking about a TV show that has nothing to do with the project, so you suggest that everyone gets back to work. Someone you consider a close friend rolls her eyes and tells you to stop being so bossy.

Ask the girls to begin their I-Statement with “When you call me bossy, I feel...”

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Step 6: Talk about the activity

ESTIMATED TIME: 5–7 minutes

When the girls are finished working through their I-Statements, ask the group to share their thoughts on the following questions:

- “ • *How are I-Statements different from other ways of responding to conflict?*
- *How do you feel when you use an I-Statement?*
- *How will you use I-Statements in your own life?* ”

We recommend you close by emphasizing the value of I-Statements while recognizing that they don't always work and can feel a little odd at first. You should say what feels natural to you, but here's an idea:

“ *I-Statements can help you have honest conversations and resolve your conflicts, but there are no guarantees. Remember, you can only control your actions, not the other person's. You're not responsible for how other people act in a conflict; you're only responsible for you. If you use an I-Statement and try to be as thoughtful as possible, you know you've done your best.*

I-Statements may feel a little weird at first—like anything new. That's okay. The more you practice, the easier it will get. And I can almost guarantee you'll be amazed by the difference they make! ”

Finally, ask the girls to commit to using one I-Statement before your next meeting—and commit to it yourself. Then during your next get-together, you can all share how it went.

Commit to
using at least one
I-Statement before
your next meeting.
The more you use
them, the easier
it will get!

JOIN US TO BAN BOSSY

Post “I will #banbossy” to your social media channels and visit banbossy.com to take the pledge and learn more.

BFF

BFF (Be a Friend First) is Girl Scouts’ bully-prevention initiative to help girls speak up **IN** and **FOR** friendships. Girls tell us that they want to feel safe and protected and want to help others feel the same. Through BFF, girls build meaningful friendships and resolve conflicts peacefully and constructively. And by empowering girls to educate others and create more peace— in their schools, communities, and who knows where else?—BFF inspires girls to lead one another with friendship!

girlscouts.org/bff

Ban Bossy

LeanIn.Org is proud to partner with Girl Scouts of the USA to bring you Ban Bossy, a public service campaign to encourage leadership and achievement in girls. We’ve developed practical tips and activities to help girls flex their leadership muscles and to offer parents, teachers, troop leaders, and managers hands-on strategies for supporting female leadership.

banbossy.com

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I-Statement Handout

Good I-Statements focus on a specific behavior and how it affects you, instead of accusing or attacking the person for who they are or the way they act.

Formula for Good I-Statements

When you _____
(describe a specific action that hurt you)

I feel _____
(say your feeling)

Because _____
(why the action makes you feel that way)

Examples of I-Statements

Good

When you make fun of the way I dress, I feel hurt because your opinion is important to me.

When you make plans for us without asking me what I want to do, I feel like you don't value my opinions.

Not-so-good

You are a jerk.

You only think about yourself.

You can use I-Statements to resolve conflict in your relationships.



What types of conflicts could you encounter at home, at school, or in your community?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Choose the most common conflicts you came up with as a group and write an I-Statement for each.

1.

Conflict:

I-Statement:

When you _____
(describe a specific action that hurt you)

I feel _____
(say your feeling)

Because _____
(why the action makes you feel that way)

2.

Conflict:

I-Statement:

When you _____
(describe a specific action that hurt you)

I feel _____
(say your feeling)

Because _____
(why the action makes you feel that way)



3.

Conflict:

I-Statement:

When you _____
(describe a specific action that hurt you)

I feel _____
(say your feeling)

Because _____
(why the action makes you feel that way)

4.

Conflict:

I-Statement:

When you _____
(describe a specific action that hurt you)

I feel _____
(say your feeling)

Because _____
(why the action makes you feel that way)

