

I-Messages for Kids: Meaning + Examples

What is an I-Message?

An I-message helps you tell someone:

- how you feel
- what happened
- what you need next

It helps kids solve problems with words instead of yelling, whining, or hitting.

The Simple I-Message Formula

Use this sentence frame:

I feel ___ when ___ because ___. I need / I would like ___.

Super simple version (great for little kids)

I feel ___ when ___. Please ___.

Feelings Words Kids Can Use

happy, sad, mad, frustrated, annoyed, worried, scared, surprised, disappointed, embarrassed, left out, excited, calm

Needs / Requests Kids Can Use



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space, a turn, help, a break, quiet, to be heard, gentle hands, to share, to stop, to try again, to play together, to keep my things safe

I-Message Examples for Kids (Real-Life Situations)

Sharing & Toys

- I feel upset when you grab the toy because I was using it. I need a turn.
- I feel mad when you take my blocks because I'm still building. Please ask first.
- I feel disappointed when I don't get a turn because I was waiting. I would like a turn next.
- I feel frustrated when you knock it down because I worked hard. Please help me fix it.

Personal Space & Touching

- I feel uncomfortable when you stand so close because I need space. Please step back.
- I feel upset when you touch my hair because I don't like it. Please stop.
- I feel scared when you push because it hurts. I need gentle hands.
- I feel annoyed when you poke me because it distracts me. Please stop.

Big Noise & Classroom Distractions



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- I feel distracted when it's loud because I'm trying to listen. I need a quieter voice.
- I feel overwhelmed when everyone talks at once because my brain gets busy. I need one voice at a time.
- I feel annoyed when you yell near me because it hurts my ears. Please use a calm voice.

Line, Waiting, and Turn-Taking

- I feel upset when you cut in line because I was waiting. Please go to the back.
- I feel frustrated when I keep waiting because I want a turn. I need to know when it's my turn.
- I feel mad when you skip my turn because it's not fair. I would like my turn now.

Teasing, Hurt Feelings, and Friendship Problems

- I feel hurt when you call me names because it's not kind. I need kind words.
- I feel embarrassed when you laugh at my work because I tried my best. Please stop.
- I feel left out when you say I can't play because I want to join. Can I have a turn next round?
- I feel sad when you walk away while I'm talking because I want you to listen. Please look at me.

Interrupting & Talking Over Others

- I feel frustrated when I get interrupted because I'm not finished. Please wait.



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- I feel annoyed when you talk over me because I can't share my idea. I need you to listen.
- I feel upset when you shout answers because I want a chance too. Please raise your hand.

Accidents & Mistakes

- I feel upset when my paper rips because I worked hard. I need help fixing it.
- I feel worried when my things get lost because they are important to me. Please keep them in my cubby.
- I feel sad when you bump me because it surprised me. Please say "excuse me."

Cleanup & Classroom Jobs

- I feel frustrated when I clean alone because we're a team. I need help cleaning up.
- I feel annoyed when toys get thrown because they can break. Please put them in gently.
- I feel worried when the floor is messy because someone could trip. I need us to pick up.

"Try This Instead" (Turn Blame into an I-Message)

- "Stop it!" → I feel upset when you do that. Please stop.
- "You're mean!" → I feel hurt when you say that. I need kind words.



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- “That’s mine!” → I feel upset when you take it. Please ask for a turn.
 - “You never let me play!” → I feel left out when I can’t join. Can I play next?
 - “Be quiet!” → I feel distracted when it’s loud. I need a quieter voice.
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How to Teach I-Messages (Quick Classroom Steps)

1. **Model it** during real moments: “I feel worried when we run inside because someone could fall. I need walking feet.”
2. **Practice in calm times** with role-play cards or puppets.
3. **Coach with prompts:**
 - “What happened?”
 - “How did you feel?”
 - “What do you need?”
4. **Praise the skill**, not just behavior: “You used words to solve the problem!”



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