

Taking Responsibility for Our Feelings

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Adapted from the book, *Nonviolent Communication*, by Marshall Rosenberg, PhD

When you try to express your feelings to others, do you find that you often end up frustrated or discouraged with how the communication goes?

There is one common mistake many of us make when we try to express our feelings, we express our thoughts instead. The cost of expressing thoughts instead of feelings is quite high. When we try to express feelings but they come out as thoughts, other people usually cannot hear what we are trying to say and instead of listening to us, they end up feeling defensive and arguing back with their own point of view. Learning to express our feelings clearly leads to less conflicts, greater understanding between people, and better relationship satisfaction.

The statements in the left column below are examples of thoughts that interpret a situation or another person. In column on the right, the statements express the feelings that underlie the thoughts.

<i>These are expressions of thoughts:</i>	<i>These are expressions of feelings:</i>
I feel like a failure	I feel embarrassed and guilty
I feel as if I do all of the work	I'm feeling resentful about my workload
I feel misunderstood	I am concerned about our communication
I feel rejected by you	I'm sad that you are leaving
I feel used by her	I feel angry at how much I have given
I feel as if I am living with a wall	When you do not respond to me, I feel discouraged and dejected
I feel disrespected	I am not comfortable with the way that you are speaking to me
You are disrespecting me	I feel angry when you say that because I hear your words as an insult
You are yelling at me!	When you raise your voice, I feel scared
I feel my boss is being manipulative	When my boss says that, I feel hurt, angry, and scared
I feel inadequate about my job	I feel disappointed, impatient, and frustrated when I make mistakes

Hint: As you can see in the column on the left, when the words "I feel" are followed by "I", "you", "he", "she", "they", "it", "that", "like", or "as if", it is often a clue that you are expressing a thought instead of a feeling.

Build your feeling vocabulary! See the attached pages for an extensive list of feeling words.