

# Conflict Resolution Tool: Communicate Your Feelings & Needs

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In Honest, Direct, Respectful, Dennis Adams describes a three step process for communicating your needs to others. Marshall Rosenberg's Center for Non-Violent Communication ([www.cnvc.org](http://www.cnvc.org)) describes 4 steps. I have merged those processes and other ideas to build this tool, which can be used in times of conflict to share your feelings and work toward a mutual resolution.

The script to remember is:

## When... I feel... [I need]... I want / wish / wonder...

1. **"When...." Identify the problem behavior or situation:** The more concrete and specific, the better. Do not introduce judgment or evaluation. An easy way to check if this is an "unarguable truth" is to ask: is this something I can see with my eyes? Hear? Feel in my body? Would everyone else be able to see the same thing I can "see" right now? Would a video camera see it?
2. **"I feel..." Identify the feeling:** State the emotion you are feeling (e.g. "I feel sad..." or angry... or scared.) Be careful not to say "I feel like you are [ignoring me... purposely making it hard on me....]" Statements like that are your interpretation of their motivation, not how *you feel* because of their *behavior*. When you describe your feeling, you take responsibility for it. (We cannot control other people's actions... we can and do make choices about how we respond.)
  - **"I need..." Identify a core need:** This statement may not always feel necessary. But often underneath a feeling there is a fundamental need that is unmet. Do you need to feel respected? Valued? Safe? In control? Nurtured? Trusted?
3. **Request: Identify something you want, wish, or wonder.**
  - "I want" = what action you want them to take. (Be specific and make sure it's possible.)
  - "I wish" says what you wish would happen, without insisting they have to do it for you.
  - "I wonder" is a continuation of your feeling statement – it's an invitation to them to help you understand their perspective rather than you trying to create your own interpretation.

Imagine if you said, in frustration: "You never pick up around the house. I always have to do all the work." That would likely put the other person on the defensive, and it's easy to get into a battle of one-up-manship where you both pull out all your martyr cards about how hard you work and how unappreciated you are. Instead, try: "**When** you leave your piles of clean laundry in the TV room, **I feel** stressed and feel like I need to deal with it. **I need** our house to feel like a haven where I can relax. **I wish** the house was tidier so we could both enjoy our time here together."

This re-frames things from being antagonists to working together as allies toward a mutual goal. And even if they can't do what you want to happen, they may be willing to help you find other solutions. Let's look at a few more examples.

- Instead of "You don't care about this project – you never respond to me!", try "**When** you don't respond to emails, **I feel** frustrated. **I wonder** if you really want to do this project."
- Instead of "You need to get your act together and be on time", try "**When** you're late to meet me, **I feel** unloved. **I wish** you could be on time or let me know when you're running late."
- Instead of saying "I've told you 1000 times not to leave your shoes all over the house", try "**When** we're late to school because you can't find your shoes, **I feel** frustrated. **I want** you to always put your shoes on the shelf, so we can find them when you need them."
- Instead of "Why do you criticize everything I do?", try "**when** you tell me to do things differently, **I feel** judged and disrespected. **I wish** I felt trusted by you, and that if you wonder why I do things the way I do, you could ask me about my reasons."

## Re-Write These Sentences

Use the script "When you... I feel... [I need]... I want / wish / wonder..." to re-write these sentences.

To partner: "You never clean the kitchen after you eat breakfast. I'm always stuck doing it."

To child: "I hate it when you stand on the furniture."

To friend: "You were so rude to that person! Why do you act like that?"

To co-worker: "You say you'll take care of projects, but then they never get done on time."

To neighbor: "Stop leaving your trash bin where it blocks my driveway."

Think of a situation (or two) in your life that is bothering you right now. One way to pinpoint unmet needs is to look for recurrent conflicts and chronic complaints. Think about statements you make (out loud or in your head) which start with "you always," "you never", "why can't you", and "why don't you." Then, transform a complaint into a simple statement about what you see, feel, need, and wish.

When you...

I feel...

[I need]...

I want / wish / wonder..."