

# How to Say What You're Feeling

"I can't believe that you forgot to come over and study with me last night!" shouted Sherri as she walked down the hall toward her best friend, Taylor. "You're so thoughtless sometimes. You just don't care about anyone but yourself!"

"You're being ridiculous, Sherri," replied Taylor. "I didn't come over because I had to stay late at baseball practice. I called and told your dad. I guess you didn't get the message."

"Because of you," Sherri said, "I failed today's math test. Go away and leave me alone."

Sherri spent the rest of the day upset at Taylor. She was so mad, she wanted to scream. Now she would have to work hard to make up for today's low test score.

Have you ever been really angry with one of your friends or someone in your family for letting you down? Have you wanted to scream or yell, or even strike out and punch something? Everybody has emotions like this, but the key to controlling them is recognizing what you are feeling and why, as well as understanding what you can do about them.

## Finding the Real Feeling

Sherri really is angry. But if she took the time to look at her feelings, she'd realize that the person she's angry with is herself. It wasn't Taylor's responsibility to make sure she studied for the math test; it was hers. When she didn't do well on the test, she blamed her friend because that was easier than admitting she had messed up.

Think about how you feel sometimes. You might think you are feeling down or depressed when actually you're just tired. Did you stay up extra late last night? Did you have to get up earlier than usual this morning? Before you put a label on how you are feeling, look at what is going on in your life for clues. Sherri thought she was angry at Taylor, but what she was really feeling was guilt. Learning to recognize your real true feelings is the first step in knowing what to do with them.

## Now What?

Once you have a handle on your honest feelings, it's time to do something with them. Yelling at your parents, siblings, or friends is rarely the solution to any conflict. It will just increase the negative feelings you have, and the problem won't be solved. Working through your emotions so you can work out problems takes a number of communication skills that you will need to learn. You'll use these skills for the rest of your life.

The first key to sharing how you feel and resolving a conflict is picking the right place and time to talk. Don't try to discuss your curfew with your dad as he is flying out the front door late for work. Don't try to smooth out the argument with your brother when he is in the middle of writing a report. You need to choose a time and place that will allow you both to give your full attention to the situation. And you should avoid having to worry about time limits or interruptions.

## The Skill of Listening

Hearing and listening are not the same thing. Think about watching television. You often hear the words and music of the commercials, but are you listening to them? Notice how your attention shifts when the commercial ends and your show comes back on. The same thing can happen during a conversation. It's easy to daydream when someone else is talking, or to think about what you are going to say as soon as they finish. But both of these actions mean you aren't listening. Really listening to what the other person is saying is an important part of understanding how he or she is feeling and what the problem actually is. To do this, you need to do the following:

- Make and keep eye contact.
- Ask questions if you don't understand something or didn't hear it properly.
- Respond immediately when asked about something.
- Give your full, undivided attention.
- Nod now and then.
- Never interrupt.

## The Skill of Responding

After you have listened closely to someone explaining his or her thoughts and feelings, it's your turn to speak. Before you start talking, however, try doing a "reality check," a skill that makes sure you understand what you've just heard. You *paraphrase* (PAIR-uh-fraze; summarize) the person's words to show that you were listening and that you are trying to understand his or her side of the story.

For example, imagine if Taylor had responded to Sherri's anger by saying, "Sherri, you are feeling really angry at me because I didn't show up last night and help you study for the math test. You didn't do well on it, and you think that it's my fault."

Do you think that Sherri would have gotten so angry if she had realized that Taylor was truly listening to her?

Now it's your turn to express your feelings. Make this part easier for everyone by learning to use "I" messages instead of "You" messages. Start your statements with "I." This will let you express how someone's behavior makes you feel. Instead of "You are so thoughtless," you might say, "I felt really sad when you didn't come over." Taylor's statement "You are being ridiculous" could be turned into "I feel really angry inside when you yell at me, Sherri." Messages that start with "you" will make a person feel defensive, while "I" statements express a feeling.

Take a look at how each of these statements makes you feel when you read it:

"You didn't call me like you said you were going to!" or "I felt really disappointed when you didn't call last night."

"You always make me late!" or "I am late to school when you aren't ready on time."

It's important to realize that your life will be full of emotions. However, learning to recognize what you are honestly feeling and then learning how to deal with it are even more important. Listen, respond, and communicate!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. How does Sherri feel?

- A** happy
- B** scared
- C** bored
- D** angry

2. What sequence of actions is described in the passage?

- A** steps students can take to prepare for a math test
- B** steps people can take to communicate their feelings
- C** steps adults can take to make sure they get a good night's sleep
- D** steps baseball coaches can take to improve the performance of their team

3. Read these sentences from the passage: "After you have listened closely to someone explaining his or her thoughts and feelings, it's your turn to speak. Before you start talking, however, try doing a 'reality check,' a skill that makes sure you understand what you've just heard."

What can be concluded from this information?

- A** When speaking to others about your feelings, it is important to use "I" messages instead of "You" messages.
- B** Sometimes people watch television commercials without paying much attention to them.
- C** Sherri is angry at Taylor because Taylor did not come over and study with her the night before.
- D** Understanding how other people feel is important when communicating how you feel.

4. What would probably be a good place to talk about your feelings with someone?

- A** a quiet room with only you and the other person in it
- B** a busy restaurant that plays loud music at all times
- C** a classroom full of students taking a math test
- D** a movie theater with big screens and lots of people

5. What is this passage mostly about?

- A how to daydream when others are talking
- B how to make friends at school
- C how to communicate your feelings
- D how to ignore people when they bother you

6. Read the following sentences: "It's important to realize that your life will be full of **emotions**. However, learning to recognize what you are honestly feeling and then learning how to deal with it are even more important."

What does the word **emotions** mean above?

- A children
- B feelings
- C tests
- D friends

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

When people have bad feelings, \_\_\_\_\_ they should identify exactly what they are feeling and why.

- A first
- B finally
- C never
- D including

8. How is listening different from hearing?

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9. Why should people use "I" messages instead of "You" messages when expressing their feelings?

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10. Imagine that Sherri followed all the steps recommended by the passage before expressing her feelings to Taylor. What might she have said or done differently when speaking to Taylor in the hall? Support your answer with information from the passage.

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## Teacher Guide &amp; Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 830

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8. How is listening different from hearing?

**Suggested answer:** Answers may vary but should all recognize that listening entails actively paying attention, while hearing does not.

9. Why should people use "I" messages instead of "You" messages when expressing their feelings?

**Suggested answer:** Answers may vary but should all reflect the passage. For example, students might respond that "I" statements show others how their behavior makes a person feel, while "you" statements make others feel defensive.

10. Imagine that Sherri followed all the steps recommended by the passage before expressing her feelings to Taylor. What might she have said or done differently when speaking to Taylor in the hall? Support your answer with information from the passage.

**Suggested answer:** Answers may vary, as long as they are supported by the passage. For example, students might respond that Sherri would have used more "I" messages when speaking to Taylor. Instead of saying, "You're so thoughtless sometimes" and "You don't care about anyone but yourself," she might have said, "I'm feeling upset because you didn't show up to study with me last night."