

Effective Conflict Resolution Language

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss how the way we speak in a conflict situation can either help or hinder the resolution process. The particular areas of focus include:

1. The Role of Language in Conflict
2. Active Listening Skills to Monitor Language
 - a. I-Statements
 - b. Clarifying Questions

1. The Role of Language in Conflict

When we are in conflict, how we express ourselves can make a big difference. How we say something, or our choice of words, can either escalate or de-escalate a conflict.

🔗 **EXAMPLE** When you're upset, it's easy to react and say something like, "You're so selfish. All you think about is yourself. I just can't count on you. You borrow something, and you never return it."

Those are very blaming statements because you're reactive, and the statements focus on the person. When you say something about someone's character, that person is going to react, and the conflict will escalate: "Well, what do you mean, I'm selfish? I'm no more selfish than you are."

There is now a back and forth fight here, with both parties defending their character. This occurs because blaming statements focus on the person rather than the issue at hand.

2. Active Listening Skills to Monitor Language

One of the goals of conflict resolution is to move away from making those blaming, reactive statements, and move toward responding consciously.

One way to do this is through **active listening**. This is a way of listening to people by giving them your full attention, both verbally and nonverbally, and then checking in with them to make sure that what you heard and understood is what they intended.

Engaging in active listening doesn't necessarily mean that you agree with what someone is saying, but rather

that you accept it by listening to and checking in on your understanding of that person's truth. It is important to note this difference between **agreement and acceptance**.

Two active listening techniques we can use to respond consciously are:

- I-statements
- Clarifying questions



TERMS TO KNOW

Active Listening

A conflict resolution technique used to confirm understanding of a message without indicating or implying agreement

Agreement vs. Acceptance

The distinction between agreeing with a statement and indicating that the hearer understands the statement as true in the mind of the speaker

2a. I-Statements

Active listening involves the use of I-statements instead of you statements. As you learned in an earlier lesson, an I-statement owns the speaker's response instead of making a general statement about another person's character.

I-statements are therefore a way of responding more consciously to a particular problem, action, or behavior.

➡ **EXAMPLE** Instead of "You're so selfish," you might say, "When I hear loud music playing every night after 10, I feel really anxious and nervous because I'm not going to get to sleep, and I have to get up early in the morning."

You've now made a statement owning the issue as your response to a particular behavior that this person has engaged in. You're talking about a specific action, not a general character flaw.

2b. Clarifying Questions

In addition to I-statements, active listening involves checking in to make sure you understand the other person's point of view.

By asking a clarifying question like, "My understanding here is x; did I get that right?" you can clarify whether you understood the person correctly while also letting them know that you care enough to make sure that you completely heard and understood what that person said.

Again, this does not mean that you necessarily agree with what you are hearing. You may agree, or you may not agree; you are simply accepting that what you hear is true for that person.

You want to make sure that you understand that person's truth, which is why asking clarifying questions is so important in a conflict situation.

Clarifying questions are also important for the intervener in the conflict resolution process. The conflict intervener is going to be asking these questions to make sure that he or she understands what the two parties are expressing.

If, as the intervener, you hear the parties using blaming statements, which they may do when anger has made

them reactive, you can use active listening skills to reframe what you hear.

🔗 **EXAMPLE** One party says, “He's just a wild person. He's just constantly noisy, and he doesn't care about anybody else in the building. I can't get any sleep at night because there's always loud music playing.”

As the intervener, you could reply, “You're saying you're very upset. You can't get sleep, and you'd like it to be quiet at night. Is that correct? Did I get that right?” In this way, you're both reflecting back what you heard and reframing the blaming you statement as an I-statement.



BIG IDEA

Our use of language is incredibly important both as a conflict intervener and as a participant in a conflict. It's important to remember not to react with a blaming statement, but to use our active listening skills, such as I-statements and clarifying questions, to check in and make sure that our understanding of a particular situation is correct.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about **the role of language in conflict**. What we say and how we say it can either escalate or de-escalate a conflict. You now understand that using **active listening skills**, such as I-statements and clarifying questions, to monitor language can help diffuse a situation by focusing on the issue at hand and our understanding of that issue rather than the other person's character. Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.



TERMS TO KNOW

Active Listening

A conflict resolution technique used to confirm understanding of a message without indicating or implying agreement.

Agreement vs. Acceptance

The distinction between agreeing with a statement and indicating that the hearer understands the statement as true in the mind of the speaker.