

YOU & I

WHAT'S DIFFERENT ABOUT THESE TWO STATEMENTS?

STATEMENT 1

"When you ask someone for help time and time again, they are going to resent you. You feel real funny and you don't want to ask again. You get depressed after you try this a number of times and get no real help. What are you supposed to do? You just go on and on, and hope it will go away."

STATEMENT 2

"I find when I ask someone for help time and time again, they seem to resent me. I feel funny and I don't want to ask again. I get depressed after I try this a number of times, and I get no real help. What am I supposed to do? I just go on and on, and hope it will go away."

BOTH STATEMENTS ARE TRYING TO SAY THE SAME THING, EXCEPT . . .

In the first statement, we hear someone else telling us by implication how we should feel. If we don't feel that way, it can feel as though we're being told that we're strange and different, and may find ourselves inwardly resenting being grouped with that person's feelings.

The second statement is a direct report of someone else's experience, and leaves it up to us to choose whether or not we associate with it. It gives us permission to listen to it, and choose how we feel:

1. "Yes, I feel the same way. This is also my experience."
2. "No. I can understand how you may feel the way you do, but what you say does not relate to me and my experience."

In groups, it is important that members relate their direct experience and take full ownership and responsibility for their statements. This is best done through the use of **I** statements.

- I have no right to tell someone, "When so and so happens, you feel this way."
- I have every right to say, "When so and so happens, I feel this way."

In the normal conversational vernacular, the **you** means of expression is frequently used. However, in self-help groups where reports of direct individual experience are frequently so helpful, the use of **I** statements becomes more and more important.

We realize how difficult it is for some to reorient their habitual form of expression. Please don't get upset if you're interrupted with a gentle request to change your expression from a **you** statement into an **I** statement.