

# How To Tell Somebody Something They'd Rather Not Hear

... and how to say something you'd rather not say, that is, how to

**EXPRESS FEELINGS, OFFER HELP or ASK FOR HELP** in areas such as these:

## light-to-serious stuff like . . .

- dirty dishes in the sink
- somebody cutting in a checkout line
- inconsiderate coworkers, roommates or family members
- academic / career concerns
- money matters / time issues
- personal hygiene

## and really serious stuff like . . .

- life transitions
- dishonesty
- drinking & other drug use
- eating disorders / sleep disorders
- mental health concerns
- harassment
- violence in relationships

**We use a conversational formula that reflects the three aspects of our experience:**

**feeling, behavior, thought** in the order they usually occur, feelings first, then behavior (doing or saying something), then thought (why the behavior causes our concern, not why the person did what they did). This formula helps us sort through our own feelings and thoughts and express them effectively.

Avoid the phrase 'I *feel that*...' since this skips expressing feelings, the key element!

**I feel . . . about . . . because . . .**

Fill the blanks as appropriate and 'make a nasty sandwich with nice bread,' where the middle part, the formula, addresses the troublesome or troubling behavior. 'Wrap the sandwich' with permission at the start ("Can we talk now?") and gratitude at the end ("Thanks for listening"). It is helpful to practice the formula in advance with short roleplays. Tell the truth!

"Could we talk for a few minutes? I've been **feeling** annoyed **about** your leaving stuff all over the living room **because** I can't have company when it's messy."

"Is this a good time? I **feel** concerned **about** your sleeping so much **because** you have missed some important classes" and follow up with questions, such as: "Is there anything troubling you that you can tell me about?" OR "I wonder if maybe you are feeling depressed."

"I need some help and wonder if you could listen to my concern. I've been **feeling** concerned **about** myself **because**... and I'd like you to listen."

Suggest a next step (one or more possible solutions) or a consequence, if appropriate. Thank the person for listening.

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**THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION** (See *feelings and values lists*, over)  
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# I feel... about... because....

## Feelings

<b>A</b> abandoned accepted affectionate <b>afraid</b> alarmed <b>angry</b> annoyed anxious appreciated awkward	<b>F</b> fearful frantic frustrated <b>G</b> grateful guilty <b>H</b> <b>happy</b> helpless honored hopeful hopeless hurt <b>I</b> ignored impatient imposed upon insecure inspired <b>J</b> joyful <b>L</b> left out lonely loved <b>M</b> manipulated misunderstood <b>N</b> nervous <b>O</b> optimistic overwhelmed <b>P</b> peaceful pleased pressured put down	<b>S</b> <b>sad</b> sorry special surprised <b>T</b> taken for granted threatened troubled <b>U</b> unappreciated uncomfortable <b>V</b> vulnerable <b>W</b> wonderful worried
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## Values

<b>A</b> acceptance appreciation achievement <b>B</b> balance <b>C</b> <b>caring</b> cleanliness communication compassion confidence confidentiality consideration cooperation courage courtesy creativity curiosity <b>D</b> dependability dignity diversity <b>E</b> empathy equity <b>F</b> fairness family time flexibility forgiveness friendliness	<b>...F</b> friendship fun <b>G</b> generosity goals good decision-making good health practices gratitude <b>H</b> happiness harmony helpfulness <b>honesty</b> honor hospitality humility humor <b>I</b> inclusion independence integrity <b>J</b> justice <b>K</b> kindness <b>L</b> learning	<b>...L</b> leisure listening loyalty <b>M</b> modesty morality <b>N</b> neatness <b>P</b> patience perseverance play privacy <b>R</b> <b>respect</b> responsibility rest and sleep <b>S</b> security self-care service sharing solidarity spontaneity <b>T</b> teamwork tolerance tradition trust <b>W</b> work
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Let these lists get you started.

Add your own words.

Your word choices may depend on the role, relationship, gender and age of the person with whom you are speaking. Also, expressions of feeling and statements of value will be affected by culture and by the setting of the conversation you are having.