

## AUTONOMOUS LANGUAGE & OTHER LINGUISTIC ISSUES

“To the extent that therapist and client deny the client’s power, the client is a victim. To the extent that they believe he has power which is not his, as in changing someone else, the client is both grandiose and a victim” (Robert & Mary Goulding, 1979).

### TRY

Used by children who learned to say, “I’ll try” in order to get parents “off their back”. The client is only willing to put forth effort in a way to not succeed. Legitimate uses of the word “try” include trying (experimenting) a new ice cream flavor or trying to influence someone else’s behavior when the choice is theirs.

### SORRY

“Sorry” means you are culpable, deserve punishment, or blame. It transmits an attitude of blame. Each time you use this phrase, you experience negative feelings. If something happens that you created, instead of saying “I’m sorry”, check out “I apologize”, “excuse me”, or “I regret my action”. This is then followed up with some way of making amends. For example: You spill coffee on your friends clothes.... offer to get them cleaned.

### CAN’T vs WON’T

Can’t is used by people who were not allowed to say “no” in their families. There are very few legitimate “can’ts”, i.e., blind people can’t see.

### I – IT

The use of “it” denies autonomy. Feelings are similarly used.

Examples: It was OK (the job interview), until I forgot what to say.

I was performing well in the job interview until I forgot what to say.

My anger got the best of me.

I got angry and decided not to control my behavior.

My depression comes on.

I depressed myself by thinking .....

## NEED vs WANT

Need is used by people who were not allowed to want things in their families. There are very few things that anyone really *needs*. Examples are food, air, water, shelter, etc. No one *needs* respect from others, and they certainly may *want* it.

## MAKE FEEL

Individuals are in charge of their feelings and cannot be “made to feel” anything without their consent. It is the value that the person puts on other persons opinions, worth, or behavior that determines the feeling reaction.

Examples:      You made me mad.  
                    I get mad when you do that. (better)  
                    I make myself mad when you do that. (best)

                    How did that make you feel?  
                    How were you feeling after that happened?

## I - WE

In families or groups, people who use “we” for “I” is the self-designated spokesperson. It is important to find out if the others really are in agreement.

## SHOULD/COULD vs WANT/WILL

People who use expressions such as “I should/could be more organized” have not made a commitment to the stated goal. They are responding to social or parental mores. The individual has to identify how this behavior will satisfy his “wants” before he will be committed.

## MAYBE/PERHAPS

These words are like “try”. There is no agreement or contract when these words are used.

## MORE/LESS

A person who contracts to be “more responsible” or “less impulsive” is not making an agreement or a contract. Go for a specific behavior change contract.

## I - YOU

People who change pronouns in mid-sentence usually are repeating parental messages or slogans. “I really would like to get close to people, but you can’t just rush in.”

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