In order to boost your ability to cope with troubling feelings, it is vital to pay attention to the language you use to describe those difficulties. Many of us grew up using what we might call “externalizing” language. Externalizing language puts the cause, and the solution, on other people... “external” to us.

There are many problems with using externalizing language:

- It puts someone else in charge of my feelings.
- It sets me up as a victim of someone else’s actions.
- I become a passive recipient.
- I give emotional control of my life to another person.
- I set myself up for being powerless.
- I set myself up for more serious emotional health problems.
SOLUTION

- Remind myself that I, and only I, am in charge of MY feelings.
- Remember that no one can MAKE me feel a certain feeling.
- Use “I statements” to accurately communicate and own my feelings.
- Remember that feelings do not automatically happen – I get to choose how I feel in response to someone else’s actions. There are many possible feeling responses to another person’s actions.
- It is vital to use your brain when interpreting feelings, determining how to cope most effectively.
- Take a few seconds to answer these questions before responding:
  - What precise feeling(s) am I experiencing right now?
  - What are my thoughts about this/these feeling(s)?
  - What is the healthiest way for me to cope right now?
- Try to speak about your vulnerable feelings with this language:
  - “I feel...” or “I felt...”

EXAMPLES:

She made me scared.  →  I felt... scared when she yelled at me.
They made me sad.  →  I felt... sad when they did not include me.
You embarrassed me!  →  I felt... embarrassed when you laughed.
My mother made me angry.  →  I felt... angry when my mother did not call me back like she said she would.
She broke my heart.  →  I felt... sad and lonely because she left.
He made me anxious.  →  I felt... anxious when he did not respond to my text message.

Remember, no one else but YOU controls your feelings!