

Passive, Aggressive, and Assertive Communication

Passive Communication

During passive communication, a person prioritizes the needs, wants, and feelings of others, even at their own expense. The person does not express their own needs, or does not stand up for them. This can lead to being taken advantage of, even by well-meaning people who are unaware of the passive communicator's needs and wants.

- Soft spoken / quiet
- Allows others to take advantage
- Prioritizes needs of others
- Poor eye contact / looks down or away
- Does not express one's own needs or wants
- Lack of confidence

Aggressive Communication

Through aggressive communication, a person expresses that only their own needs, wants, and feelings matter. The other person is bullied, and their needs are ignored.

- Easily frustrated
- Speaks in a loud or overbearing way
- Unwilling to compromise
- Use of criticism, humiliation, and domination
- Frequently interrupts or does not listen
- Disrespectful toward others

Assertive Communication

Assertive communication emphasizes the importance of *both* peoples' needs. During assertive communication, a person stands up for their own needs, wants, and feelings, but also listens to and respects the needs of others. Assertive communication is defined by confidence, and a willingness to compromise.

- Listens without interruption
- Clearly states needs and wants
- Willing to compromise
- Stands up for own rights
- Confident tone / body language
- Good eye contact

Examples

Scenario	A friend asks to borrow your car. This will be a big inconvenience for you.
Passive	Umm, yeah, I guess that's fine. Do you need me to fill the tank?
Aggressive	No way! Why would I let you borrow my car? You're crazy to even ask.
Assertive	I need my car that day, but I'll have time to drop you off.

Passive, Aggressive, and Assertive Communication

Practice

Scenario	Your boss asks you to stay late, while everyone else leaves. You're always the one who stays late, and tonight you have plans.
Passive	
Aggressive	
Assertive	

Scenario	Your partner left a mess in the kitchen, and you're too busy to clean.
Passive	
Aggressive	
Assertive	

Scenario	You're at a restaurant, and the server brought you the wrong dish.
Passive	
Aggressive	
Assertive	

Scenario	A friend showed up at your house uninvited. Usually you would be happy to let them in, but this time you're busy.
Passive	
Aggressive	
Assertive	

LESSON THREE: PASSIVE, AGGRESSIVE, AND ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION

Passive, aggressive, and assertive communication refers to three styles of interaction. Everyone has the capability to use all three styles, and everyone uses them all at least occasionally. During passive communication, you put the needs and desires of others first while neglecting yourself. Aggressive communication is just the opposite: You concern yourself only with your own needs at the detriment of others.



Assertiveness refers to healthy balance between passive and aggressive communication. You clearly state your own needs, and you advocate to have them met. However, you listen to, acknowledge, and respect the needs of others. This means finding compromise.

The following chart depicts some of the differences between each style:

	Passive	Aggressive	Assertive
Basic Thought	"I am not worthy."	"You are not worthy."	"We are both worthy."
Body Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • quiet tone • eyes pointing downward or away • shoulders hunched together • fidgeting feet and hands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • loud or angry tone • staring or overly direct eye contact • pointing, clenched fist, dramatic movements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • firm but respectful tone • relaxed appearance • appropriate eye contact • appropriate gestures
Language Style	Apologetic, submissive, vague, self-deprecating.	Insulting, sarcastic, patronizing, disrespectful.	Confident, relaxed, firm, polite, respectful.
Consequences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • feel taken advantage of • feel unheard • rarely has own needs met • feels poorly about self 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • creates enemies • experiences frequent arguments • feels angry • causes others to feel poorly about themselves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • positive relationships • more fairness in meeting needs of self and others • good outcomes for both parties • feelings of confidence

Beginning to use an assertive communication style will be a challenge if you haven't used it often in the past.

Once you feel more comfortable acting assertively, choose a type of situation to practice with. Simply saying "I'm going to start being assertive" might be too much, but it'll be more manageable if you decide on a specific situation, such as conversations about what to get for dinner.

Tips for Assertive Communication

- Use the word "I". Try saying "I would like..." or "I feel...".
 - Make an effort to use good eye contact. Don't stare, but don't look at your feet either
 - Use good posture. Keep your back straight and imagine your head reaching toward the sky.
 - Avoid ambiguity. If you aren't comfortable with something, don't say: "Hmm, I don't know about that... maybe?" Instead, say: "Sorry, I'm not comfortable doing that."
 - No swearing, no criticism (unless it's legitimately constructive), and no mocking. Be careful, you can come across as mocking or critical based solely upon the tone of your voice.
 - Control the tone of your voice. Talking too loudly or too quietly are both a problem. Yelling feels aggressive, and whispering is like a big sign that says "I'm unsure about what I'm saying."
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Assertive Communication



Assertive Communication: A communication style in which a person stands up for their own needs and wants, while also taking into consideration the needs and wants of others, without behaving passively or aggressively.

Traits of Assertive Communicators

- Clearly state needs and wants
- Eye contact
- Listens to others without interruption
- Appropriate speaking volume
- Steady tone of voice
- Confident body language

Assertiveness Tips

Respect yourself. Your needs, wants, and rights are as important as anyone else's. It's fine to express what you want, so long as you are respectful toward the rights of others.

Express your thoughts and feelings calmly. Giving the silent treatment, yelling, threatening, and shaming are all great examples of what not to do. Take responsibility for your emotions, and express them in a calm and factual manner. Try starting sentences with "I feel...".

Plan what you're going to say. Know your wants and needs, and how you can express them, before entering a conversation. Come up with specific sentences and words you can use.

Say "no" when you need to. You can't make everyone happy all the time. When you need to say "no", do so clearly, without lying about the reasons. Offer to help find another solution.

Examples of Assertive Communication

"I've been feeling frustrated about doing most of the chores around the house. I understand that you're busy, but I need help. How can we make this work?"

The speaker takes responsibility for their feelings without blaming, and clearly describes their needs.

"I won't be able to take you to the airport on Friday. I've had a long week, and I want to rest."

The speaker respects their own needs and wants by clearly saying "no".

"I'm having a hard time sleeping when your music is on. What if you use headphones, or I can help you move the speakers to another room."

The speaker describes their needs, while also considering the needs and wants of the other person.

Assertive Communication

Practice

Tip: Before responding, consider what your wants and needs might be in each situation.

Your Partner: “I know you have plans for the weekend, but I really need you to watch the kids. I have a friend coming to town, and we made plans.”

Assertive Response:

Situation: You’ve just received your food at a restaurant, and it was prepared incorrectly. Your sandwich seems to have extra mayo, instead of no mayo.

Assertive Statement:

Your Friend: “Hey, can I borrow some money? I want to buy these shoes, but I left my wallet at home. I’ll pay you back soon, I swear. It won’t be like last time.”

Assertive Response:

Situation: Your neighbor is adding an expansion to their house, and the crew starts working, very loudly, at 5 AM. It has woken you up every day for a week.

Assertive Statement: