



Communication Styles

Passive, Assertive, or Aggressive

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Breathe

Mindful Exercise

Sitting meditation. Sit comfortably with your back straight, feet flat on the floor and hands in your lap. Breathing through your nose, focus on your breath moving in and out of your body. If physical sensations or thoughts interrupt your meditation, note the experience and then return your focus to your breath.

Communication Styles Quiz

• Communication Styles Quiz

•The following questions will help you get an idea of what your communication style is. Check off any for which your answer is yes. However, you'll probably be able to see that you do many of these things sometimes, so only check off those that seem to describe you best. The style for which you have most checks is your dominant communication style.

1. Passive

- Do you try to push your feelings away rather than express them to others?
- Do you fear that expressing yourself will cause others to be angry with you or not like you?
- Do you often say things like "I don't care" or "It doesn't matter to me" when you do care or it actually does matter?
- Do you keep quiet or try not to rock the boat because you don't want to upset others?
- Do you often go along with others' opinions because you don't want to be different?

Total: ___

2. Aggressive

- Are you most concerned with getting your own way, regardless of how it impacts others?
- Do you yell, swear, or use other aggressive means of communicating regularly?
- Do your friends fear you?
- Are you disrespectful toward others when communicating with them, not really caring if they get what they need as long as your needs are met?
- Do you have an attitude of "my way or the highway"? Have you ever heard anyone describe you this way?

Total: ___

3. Passive-Aggressive

- Do you have a tendency to be sarcastic when you feel angry?
- Do you tend to give people the silent treatment when you're angry with them?
- Do you often find yourself saying one thing but thinking another, such as going along with another person's wishes even though you want to do something else?
- Are you generally reluctant to express your emotions but find that how you feel gets expressed in other ways, like slamming doors or other aggressive behaviours?
- Do you fear that expressing yourself will cause others to be angry with you or stop liking you, so you try to get your message across in more subtle ways?

Total: ___

4. Assertive

- Do you believe that you have a right to express your opinions and emotions?
- When you're having a disagreement with someone, are you able to express your opinions and emotions clearly and honestly?
- When communicating with others, do you treat them with respect while also respecting yourself?
- Do you listen closely to what others are saying, sending them the message that you're trying to understand their perspective?
- Do you try to negotiate with others if you have different goals, rather than being focused on getting your own needs met?

Total: ___

The questions above will help you get an idea of what your communication style is. Check off any for which your answer is yes. However, you'll probably be able to see that you do many of these things sometimes, so only check off those that seem to describe you best. The style for which you have most checks is your dominant communication style.

**It is not uncommon for people to use different styles depending on the situation and person they're communicating with. The point is not to diagnose how you communicate, but to increase awareness of your patterns of communicating so you can choose to communicate in different ways if you choose.*

Communication Styles

Buzz Words In Communication Styles

- **Passive**
- **Aggressive**
- **Assertive**

What are they?

Passive Communicators

- **Avoids expressing their opinions or feelings, protecting their rights, and identifying and meeting their needs**
- **Do not respond overtly to hurtful or anger-inducing situations**
- **Allow grievances and annoyances to mount, usually unaware of the building**
- **Prone to explosive outbursts, which are usually out of proportion to the triggering incident**

PASSIVE COMMUNICATION is in which individuals have developed a pattern of avoiding expressing their opinions or feelings, protecting their rights, and identifying and meeting their needs.

Passive individuals do not respond overtly to hurtful or anger-inducing situations.

They allow grievances and annoyances to mount, usually unaware of the building.

Once they have reached their high tolerance threshold for unacceptable behavior, they are prone to explosive outbursts, which are usually out of proportion to the triggering incident.

After the outburst, they may feel shame, guilt, and confusion and therefore return to being passive.

Style of Passive Communicators

Passive communicators will often

- **Fail to assert for themselves**
- **Allow others to deliberately or inadvertently infringe on their rights**
- **Fail to express their feelings, needs, or opinions**
- **Tend to speak softly or apologetically**
- **Exhibit poor eye contact and slumped body posture.**

The impact of a pattern of passive communication is that these individuals:

- **Often feel anxious because life seems out of their control**
- **Often feel depressed because they feel stuck and hopeless**
- **Often feel resentful (but are unaware of it) because their needs are not being met**
- **Often feel confused because they ignore their own feelings**
- **Are unable to mature because real issues are never addressed**

A passive communicator will say, believe, or behave like:

“I’m unable to stand up for my rights.”

“I don’t know what my rights are.”

“I get stepped on by everyone.”

“I’m weak and unable to take care of myself.”

“People never consider my feelings.”

Aggressive Communicators

- **Individuals express their feelings and opinions and advocate for their needs in a way that violates the rights of others**
- **Can be verbally and/or physically abusive.**

AGGRESSIVE COMMUNICATION is a style in which individuals express their feelings and opinions and advocate for their needs in a way that violates the rights of others. Thus, aggressive communicators are verbally and/or physically abusive.

Style of Aggressive Communicators

Aggressive communicators will often:

- Try to dominate others
- Use humiliation to control others
- Criticize, blame, or attack others
- Be very impulsive
- Have low frustration tolerance
- Speak in a loud, demanding, and overbearing voice
- Act threateningly and rudely
- Not listen well
- Interrupt frequently
- Use “you” statements
- Have an overbearing or intimidating posture

The impact of a pattern of aggressive communication is that these individuals:

- Become alienated from others
- Alienate others
- Generate fear and hatred in others
- Always blame others instead of owning their issues, and thus are unable to mature

The aggressive communicator will say, believe, or behave like:

“I’m superior and right and you’re inferior and wrong.”

“I’m loud, bossy and pushy.”

“I can dominate and intimidate you.”

“I can violate your rights.”

“I’ll get my way no matter what.”

“You’re not worth anything.”

“It’s all your fault.”

“I react instantly.”

“I’m entitled.”

“You owe me.”

“I own you.”

Passive-Aggressive Communicators

- **Appear passive on the surface but are really acting out anger in a subtle, indirect, or behind-the-scenes way**
- **Usually feel powerless, stuck, and resentful**
- **Subtly undermining the object (real or imagined) of their resentments.**

PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE COMMUNICATION is a style in which individuals appear passive on the surface but are really acting out anger in a subtle, indirect, or behind-the-scenes way. People who develop a pattern of passive-aggressive communication usually feel powerless, stuck, and resentful – in other words, they feel incapable of dealing directly with the object of their resentments. Instead, they express their anger by subtly undermining the object (real or imagined) of their resentments.

Style of Passive-Aggressive Communicators

Passive-Aggressive communicators will often:

- Mutter to themselves rather than confront the person or issue
- Have difficulty acknowledging their anger
- Use facial expressions that don't match how they feel - i.e., smiling when angry
- Use sarcasm
- Deny there is a problem
- Appear cooperative while purposely doing things to annoy and disrupt
- Use subtle sabotage to get even

The impact of a pattern of passive-aggressive communication is that these individuals:

- Become alienated from those around them
- Remain stuck in a position of powerlessness (like POWs)
- Discharge resentment while real issues are never addressed so they can't mature

The passive-aggressive communicator will say, believe, or behave like:

“I’m weak and resentful, so I sabotage, frustrate, and disrupt.”

“I’m powerless to deal with you head on so I must use guerrilla warfare.”

“I will appear cooperative but I’m not.”

Assertive Communicators

- **Clearly state their opinions and feelings, and firmly advocate for their rights and needs without violating the rights of others**
- **Value themselves, their time, and their emotional, spiritual, and physical needs and are strong advocates for themselves while being very respectful of the rights of others.**

An assumption is that assertiveness sits mid-way between passive and aggressive. As you can see from the model, this isn't the case. If it was, it would indicate that assertiveness is also a gut reaction too.

Assertiveness sits in the upper part of the triangle known as the area of choice or control. This means that in order to be assertive, we have to be in control of our response. This means we have to be in control of our emotional response, no matter how we are feeling naturally.

In effect, assertiveness is showing one thing while feeling another. We have to choose what we are going to show others and what we show should be based on the situation.

Styles of Assertive Communicators

Assertive communicators will:

- State needs and wants clearly, appropriately, and respectfully
- Express feelings clearly, appropriately, and respectfully
- Use “I” statements
- Communicate respect for others
- Listen well without interrupting
- Feel in control of self
- Have good eye contact
- Speak in a calm and clear tone of voice
- Have a relaxed body posture
- Feel connected to others
- Feel competent and in control
- Not allow others to abuse or manipulate them
- Stand up for their rights

The impact of a pattern of assertive communication is that these individuals:

- Feel connected to others
- Feel in control of their lives
- Are able to mature because they address issues and problems as they arise
- Create a respectful environment for others to grow and mature

The assertive communicator will say, believe, or behave in a way that says:

“We are equally entitled to express ourselves respectfully to one another.”

“I am confident about who I am.”

“I realize I have choices in my life and I consider my options.”

“I speak clearly, honestly, and to the point.”

“I can’t control others but I can control myself.”

“I place a high priority on having my rights respected.”

“I am responsible for getting my needs met in a respectful manner.”

“I respect the rights of others.”

“Nobody owes me anything unless they’ve agreed to give it to me.”

“I’m 100% responsible for my own happiness.”

Assertiveness allows us to take care of ourselves, and is fundamental for good mental health and healthy relationships.

Let's Look At Your Quiz Scores

Communication Styles

Passive Communication

Passive people often don't communicate verbally. They tend to bottle up their emotions instead of expressing them, perhaps out of fear of hurting others or making them uncomfortable, or maybe because they don't believe their feelings or opinions matter as much as those of others. People with a passive communication style usually fear confrontation and believe that voicing their opinions, beliefs, or emotions will cause conflict. Their goal is usually to keep the peace and not rock the boat, so they sit back and say little.

Aggressive Communication

Aggressive communicators attempt to control others. They're concerned with getting their own way, regardless of the cost to others. Aggressive people are direct, but in a forceful, demanding, and perhaps even vicious way. They tend to leave others feeling resentful, hurt and afraid. They might get what they want, but it's usually at the expense of others, and sometimes at their own expense, as they may later feel guilty, regretful, or ashamed because of how they behaved.

Passive-Aggressive Communication

Like passive communicators, those who have a passive-aggressive style fear confrontation and don't express themselves directly. However, because of their aggressive tendencies, their goal is to get their way, but they tend to use indirect techniques that more subtly express their emotions, such as sarcasm, the silent treatment, or saying they'll do something for others but then "forgetting".

Assertive Communication

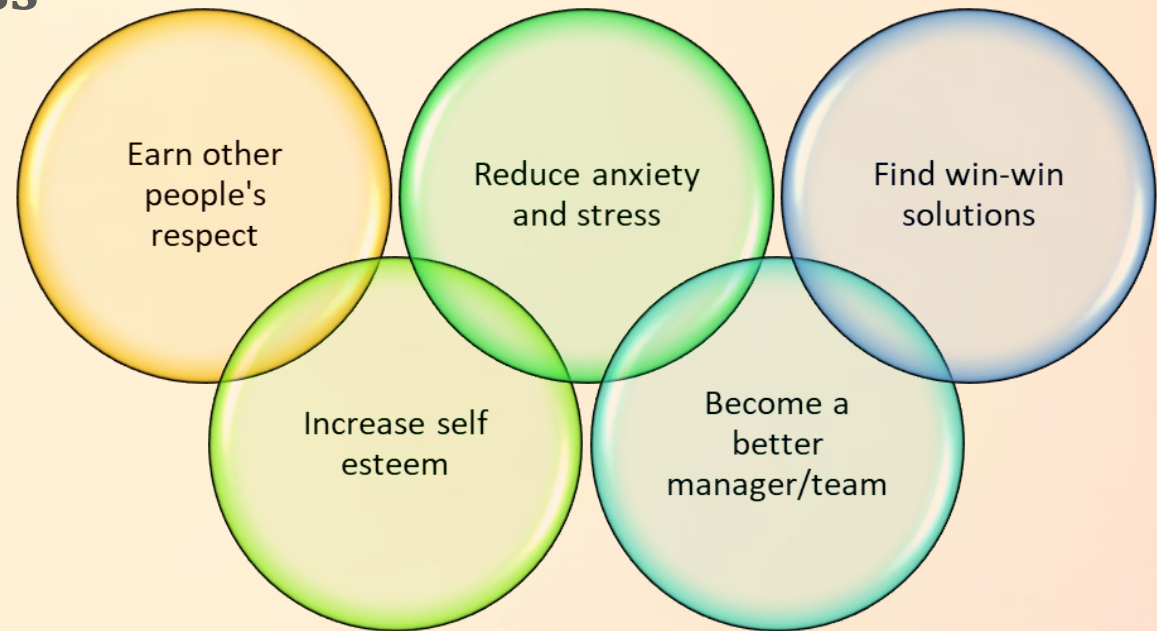
Assertive people express their wishes, thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in a direct and honest way that's respectful both of themselves and of others. They attempt to get their own needs met but also try to meet the needs of others as much as possible. They listen and negotiate, so others often choose to cooperate with them because they're also getting something out of the interaction. Others tend to respect and value assertive communicators because this communication style makes them feel respected and valued.

Assertive communication is the way people with good self-esteem tend to express themselves. They feel good about themselves, and they recognize that they have a right to express their opinions and feelings. However, this does not mean people with low self-esteem can't be assertive and being more assertive in your communication will actually improve how you feel about yourself. It will also improve your relationships and interactions with others, and this too will increase your self-esteem.

Source: DBT Made Simple: A Step-by-Step Guide to Dialectical Behavior Therapy
Book by Sheri Van Dijk

Why Is Being Assertive Important?

- Earn other's respect
- It can reduce anxiety and stress
- Increase self esteem
- Become a better person
- Find win-win solutions



Being assertive is important as it builds relationships based on trust and respect. As with communication skills, in lesson 1 Team Development, we see that it can lead to a win-win solution. It will help alleviate both stress and anxiety. It builds the team to be a cohesive and collaborative team and will increase self-esteem in team members.

Side-by-Side Comparison

Passive	Assertive	Aggressive
Too scared to say what you think	Expresses self clearly and confidently	Expresses self with aggression and irritation/anger
Avoids eye contact	Maintains eye contact	Stares in a judgmental way
Speaks softly or weakly	Speaks firmly	Speaks loudly (e.g. shouting)
Reduces own self esteem	Increases own self esteem	Reduces others' self esteem
Makes body smaller (e.g. slouching)	Firm yet welcoming posture	Closed posture (e.g. making body bigger)
Others' needs are put first	Self and others' needs are considered	Own needs are put first
Can't say "no" to others' requests or demands	Is able to say "no" in a calm and direct way	Says "no" in an aggressive and reactive way
Aims to please others	Aims to express needs	Aims to win

Passive Body Language: Includes covering the mouth, looking down, avoiding eye contact, crossed arms and placing their hand over their mouth to cover

Assertive Body Language: Includes standing straight, steady, and directly face the people to whom you are speaking while maintaining eye contact

Aggressive Body Language: Includes sharp, angular gestures, space invading, eyeballing, frowning, aggressive voice (loud, forceful, sneering)

Assertive Communication Recap

When with others

- Use “I” statements to ensure that you clearly communicate how you feel to the other person.
- Avoid extreme language.
- Use clear verbs to communicate your message.
- Actively listen to the feedback you receive and be respectful in your response.
- Speak up at the right time.
- Reflect on your position: express your needs, feelings, and thoughts with honesty and comfort.

The Skill of Assertiveness

As with any new behavior, becoming more assertive will take time and effort. Like any skill, it takes practice. Some people, especially those who have been more passive, find that communicating and acting assertively feels like acting aggressively, simply because you're not used to asking for what you want. Learning to be assertive will be uncomfortable and possibly even scary at times, but gradually you'll learn that this is the healthiest way of communicating and begin to see positive changes in your relationship.

Guidelines for Assertive Communication

1. Decide on your priorities.
2. Ask for what you want in a way that doesn't damage the relationship.
3. Negotiate.
4. Obtain information.
5. Say no in a way that doesn't damage the relationship.
6. Act according to your values and morals.

How Assertiveness is like Getting the Oil Changed

People often have difficulties asserting themselves with those they really care about, possibly because they fear they might damage the relationship by expressing their true needs and emotions. But relationships usually suffer because of a **lack** of assertiveness by one or both of the people in the relationship. Work on addressing problems as they arise in a relationship rather than letting them pile up until they come unmanageable. Many people avoid speaking up when they're unhappy in a relationship because they're afraid of consequences, for example, the other person might get angry or end the relationship altogether. The worst thing that might happen is that the relationship ends, and if you don't discuss the problems and your feelings, chances are the relationship will end anyways as resent builds.

The Role of Assertiveness in Balancing Enjoyable Activities and Responsibilities

Another important part of taking care of relationships is **developing more balance**. It's important to think about what your patterns are:

Do you have a tendency to always give in and do what your partner, friends, or family members want you to do?

Do you usually disregard others wishes and pursue your own interest?

Or are you able to find more of a balance, sometimes putting your own needs first and other times putting the needs of others first?

To live balanced lives, we all need to give, share, and sometimes **make sacrifices in relationships**, but we must also sometimes put our **own needs first** or even ask others to make sacrifices for us. **Always** giving in to other person's wishes **won't be healthy** for the relationship. If you feel guilty about putting your own needs first at times, remember, putting your needs first isn't contrary to your morals and values as long as you aren't doing this consistently or at the expense of others. Rather, putting your **own needs first is actually good self-care** and will benefit their relationships as their needs are met. Think of assertiveness as a new language: unless you have opportunities to speak this new language, you're going to lose it fast.

Starting Small . . .

Start practicing “assertive talk” with someone you are comfortable – someone safe.

When practicing assertiveness remember to:

- Use “I” statements
- Use your body language
- Rehearse your conversations
- Remember that you can’t control others
- Express yourself positively
- Practice eye contact
- Get comfortable saying “no”
- Watch your emotions
- Remain open to positive and negative feedback
- Practice in low-risk situations

Scenario: A friend asks to borrow your car: This will be a big inconvenience for you.

PASSIVE RESPONSE: Ummm, yeah, I guess that is fine. Do you need me to fill the tank?

AGGRESSIVE RESPONSE: No way! Why would I let you borrow my car? You're crazy to even ask.

ASSERTIVE RESPONSE: I need my car that day, but I'll have time to drop you off.

Scenario #2: Your boss asks you to stay late, while everyone else leaves. You're always the one who stays late, and tonight you have plans. How would you answer this in the following ways?

PASSIVE RESPONSE

AGGRESSIVE RESPONSE

ASSERTIVE RESPONSE

Scenario #3: Your partner, left a mess in the kitchen, and you're too busy to clean. How would you answer this in the following ways?

PASSIVE RESPONSE

AGGRESSIVE RESPONSE

ASSERTIVE RESPONSE

Scenario #4: You're at a restaurant, and the server brought you the wrong dish. How would you answer this in the following ways?

PASSIVE RESPONSE

AGGRESSIVE RESPONSE

ASSERTIVE RESPONSE

Scenario #5: A friend showed up at your house uninvited. Usually you would be happy to let them in, but this time you're busy. How would you answer this in the following ways?

PASSIVE RESPONSE

AGGRESSIVE RESPONSE

ASSERTIVE RESPONSE

The Birthday Line-Up

Line up according to your birthday (month/day) BUT there is a catch. You CANNOT speak!

You can use signs and symbols to get in order.

OBJECTIVE: This simple team-building exercise instills qualities like leadership, communication, collaboration, and problem-solving skills.

TIME: 10-12 minutes

TOOLS: None required

PARTICIPANTS: 12-20

HOW TO PLAY: Pair participants into teams of 8-12 and ask them to stand side-by-side. Now ask them to stand in order of their birthday (month and day). The catch to this simple game is that employees have to complete the entire task without talking to each other. They must use signs and symbols to get into order.

The team which is able to get into order successfully the earliest wins.

RESULT: This game is highly effective if you want to foster great communication and interpretation among your employees. Consequently, it also gives every employee to hone their leadership skills while giving out directions to their team members on how to solve the task.

Assertive communication takes practice and is something that not all are comfortable doing. It takes practice, but once you learn the art form of this communication it will help with communicating with different communicators and create a win-win solution.

QUESTIONS?

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