

# **Assertiveness Training: Let Your Voice Be Heard!**

*Improve Your Communication Skills  
for Better Outcomes*



*caregivers*

PREVENT  PROTECT  PROMOTE  
*abuse/neglect* *clients* *dignity*

## **FACILITATOR GUIDE**

Developed by:

**University of Wisconsin Oshkosh**

Center for Community Development, Engagement & Training (CCDET)

[www.uwosh.edu/ccdet/caregiver](http://www.uwosh.edu/ccdet/caregiver)

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[caregiver@uwosh.edu](mailto:caregiver@uwosh.edu)

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## Learning Points

Let's review the main learning points:

- Understand the difference between passive, aggressive and assertive communication techniques
- Learn to use an assertive technique
- Understand why assertiveness is important

## Assertive Communication

Communicating assertively with others does not come naturally for many people. Most of us need to learn how to be assertive communicators, rather than passive or aggressive. What does it mean to be “assertive?”

- Assertiveness is about standing up for yourself, but also about respecting the opinions and needs of others.
- When we communicate assertively, we are clear about our opinions and wishes, but we are also open to others.

## Passive, Aggressive, Assertive Traits

Each of the three communication techniques uses very different approaches. Most of us use techniques that will be found in more than one area. In order to recognize a technique, let's discuss some common traits of each.

*[While reviewing the traits of each technique, ask participants to identify privately some traits they see in themselves. Most will choose traits across more than one category.]*

*After reviewing all the techniques, ask participants to circle some of the assertive traits they might choose to try out when returning to the workplace.]*

## Passive

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- Easily intimidated by others
- Worries about others getting angry
- Sometimes feels like a “doormat” (walked on by others)
- Believes that his/her rights and opinions are not as important as those of other people
- Avoids eye contact
- Appears shy and has difficulty saying “no” when asked to do a favor
- Overly courteous and might do just about anything to avoid a fight, argument, or disagreement
- Gets angry when someone violates their rights, but isn’t likely to stand up for themselves directly
- Feels put down, taken advantage of, or abused
- Intimidated by authority and has a hard time dealing with supervisors
- At high risk for being used or taken advantage of
- Rarely gets what they want or need



NOTE: In a dangerous situation, it is appropriate to behave passively in order to protect yourself.

## Passive/Aggressive

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- Passive in communication; aggressive in actions
- Agrees to a task then sabotages the outcome
- Says one thing and then does another
- Won’t stand up to someone directly, but criticizes others behind their backs
- Refuses to take responsibility for actions and prior agreements



## Aggressive

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- Ignores others' feelings and rights
- Is demanding, angry, and hostile in getting to their goal
- Believes that their rights, opinions, and needs are more important than others' (her way or the highway)
- Violates others' rights and boundaries in an effort to get what they want
- Sends the message: "I matter more than you do, so get out of my way"
- Uses a loud tone of voice, violates personal space, "in your face"
- Exaggerates the facts
- Often does not get their needs met because they alienate others



## Assertive

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- Respects the opinions and needs of others (empathetic)
- Uses a calm tone of voice
- Believes in their own opinion and right to be heard (self-respect)
- Makes eye contact and respects the personal space of others
- Avoids labels and judgments
- Asks rather than demands
- Values themselves and values others equally
- Is neither a "doormat" (passive) or a "steamroller" (aggressive)
- Uses "I" statements to get the message across
- Does not exaggerate the situation
- Sticks to the facts
- Often gets their needs met because they are respectful of others



# Tips for Assertive Communication

There are a variety of ways to express yourself assertively.

## Making Assertive Statements

Since assertiveness doesn't come naturally to most of us, let's practice a bit to perfect your technique. Take a look at the sample sentence structures below.

Use this template to communicate more assertively:

When you \_\_\_\_\_, I feel \_\_\_\_\_."

For example:

"When you raise your voice, I feel threatened."

Sometimes you need to tell a person how their behavior affected you:

"When you \_\_\_\_\_, then I \_\_\_\_\_, and I feel \_\_\_\_\_."

For example:

"When you arrive late, I have to wait, and I feel frustrated."

An assertive person may also need to tell the person what they want:

"When you arrive late, I have to wait, and I feel frustrated. *Can I count on you to be on time tomorrow?*"

*[Ask participants if they have another example or prepare some additional examples yourself. If you have extra time, make up some mini scenarios. Ask participants how they might compose responses, using the templates above.]*

## Do's and Don'ts

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**Do:**

- Express feelings honestly – take ownership of your feelings
- Be realistic, respectful, and honest
- Express preferences and priorities
- Choose your response carefully, especially when emotions are high

**Don't:**

- Depersonalize feelings or deny ownership
- Say "You make me mad"
- Exaggerate, minimize, or use sarcasm
- Agree just to be sociable or agree unwillingly

## Using Assertive Body Language

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*[Cross your arms, put a scowl on your face, tap your foot. In a loud or gruff voice, ask the class how they would feel about communicating with a person with that kind of body language.*

*Ask what the body language tells them.*

*Demonstrate again but using assertive body language as described below.]*

**Posture:** Erect but relaxed, shoulders straight

**Facial expression and gestures:** Relaxed, thoughtful, caring, genuine smile, eye contact

**Voice:** Even-toned, calm, not too loud or soft

## Techniques to Avoid

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**Handing over Your Power:** "You make me feel so frustrated!" Actually, no one can make you feel anything. You are the owner of your feelings! Beginning the sentence will "You make me" also puts the other person on the defensive.

**Making Judgments:** "I got here on time. You could have, too." You may feel embarrassed after the person explains that the babysitter was late. Don't assume that you have all the facts.

**Applying Labels:** “If you weren’t so disorganized, you might be on time more often.” The person you’re speaking to begins to defend themselves about being disorganized, and forgets all about the original message, being late.

**Over-generalizing:** “You’re always late.” The person probably isn’t *always* late, so they will focus on “always” instead of hearing your message.

**Finding Fault:** “It’s not my fault you’re late.” Again, the focus instantly goes to who caused the situation, and veers away from the message.

**Failing to Empathize:** “I can’t understand why you’re always late.” A good rule is to try and put yourself in the other person’s shoes.

## Activity: One Conversation, Three Styles

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*[A script of three styles of the same conversation is located at the end of this training. You may recruit “actors” to play the roles, or you may opt to download the short video clip from the caregiver training website. The video is recommended.]*



Let’s take a look at a situation in which two people have a conversation that demonstrates each of the 3 styles. After each scene, we’ll discuss which style was demonstrated (passive, aggressive or assertive).

*[Tell participants that you’ll set the stage for them before they observe the three different approaches.]*

Sara is a caregiver in a small group home for persons with moderate developmental disabilities. Sara works the third shift, from 10 pm to 6 am, so that she can be home during the day with her 3-year-old daughter and get her 7-year-old son off to school. Another caregiver named Audrey relieves Sara each morning. Sara can’t leave the facility until another staff person is there.

It’s Thursday at 6:15 am, and Audrey is late for the third time this week. Sara knows that Audrey has a new boyfriend, and Sara suspects that Audrey is out late every night with him. Sara is upset because she needs to get home to her family. Sara also thinks Audrey is taking advantage of her.

At this point, Audrey breezes into the group home with a big smile on her face.

*[Start the video. The passive example is first. Stop the video after the first example. Ask the following questions.]*



## Scene One

1. Which communication approach did Sara (the overnight caregiver) choose to use with Audrey (who was late)?

*[Passive]*

2. Why do you think so?

*[Refer students back to the list of passive traits and ask them to call out which ones fit Sara's approach. Play scene two.]*

## Scene Two

1. Which communication approach did Sara (the overnight caregiver) choose this time to use with Audrey (who was late)?

*[Aggressive]*

2. Why do you think so?

*[Refer students back to the list of aggressive traits and ask them to call out which ones fit Sara's approach. Play Scene three.]*

## Scene Three

1. Using an assertive approach this time, Sara got what she wanted from Audrey, an agreement to be on time in the future. What traits did Sara use in this scene?

*[Refer students back to the list of assertive traits and ask them to call out which ones fit Sara's approach.]*

2. Audrey also responded very differently this time. Why do you think so?

*[Possible responses: Sara explained her side of the story; Sara used facts, not emotions, Audrey didn't feel threatened, etc. NOTE: Students sometimes find the 3rd scene unrealistic or too perfect. Acknowledge those feelings but bring them back to the example. Explain that while an assertive approach doesn't always work, it's worth a try.]*

# Why Assertiveness is Important



Can you think of some reasons why it may be better for you to use an assertive communication style, rather than passive or aggressive?

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*[Give participants a few moments to write some ideas in their participant guide. Write answers on flip chart.]*

*Possible responses:*

- *Others are more likely to listen to you*
- *Others admire your sense of self-respect*
- *You're more likely to get what you want*
- *Others see you as an honest person*
- *Co-workers see you as cooperative and caring*
- *Managers see you in a positive light*
- *Clients think of you as a professional*
- *You appear to be a fair person*
- *You seem thoughtful and caring*
- *Others are less likely to take advantage of you*
- *People welcome you into their environment*
- *You feel better about yourself and release stress*
- *You won't be angry with yourself for not speaking up*
- *Others understand you more clearly]*

How does assertive communication result in better care for clients or residents?

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*[Possible responses:*

- *Co-workers spend less time on interpersonal disagreements*
- *Focus is on clients rather than co-workers*
- *Stress between co-workers and supervisors is reduced*
- *Assertiveness focuses on the positive, rather than the negative*
- *Miscommunication produces stress and frustration; stressed caregivers more prone to abuse or neglect]*

## **Wrap-Up**

Let's review the Learning Points:

- Understand the difference between passive, aggressive and assertive communication techniques
- Learn to use an assertive technique
- Understand why assertiveness is important

## Script: One Conversation, Three Styles

### PASSIVE EXAMPLE:

**Audrey:** Good morning, Sara. It's a lovely morning, isn't it? How did everything go last night?

**Sara:** It was pretty quiet. Gary got up a couple of times—I think he's excited about today being his birthday.

**Audrey:** I'm sure we'll have a great party for him today—I'm picking up his cake after everyone goes to the activity center.

**Sara:** (looking down at her feet) Um, Audrey, you know, it's almost 6:20.

**Audrey:** Oh, I guess I am a teensy bit late. Sorry about that! I had a fabulous time on my date last night!

**Sara:** Well...that's ok. I'm glad you had a good time.

**Audrey:** See you later.

*Sara walks outside to her car.*

**Sara:** (muttering to herself) That Audrey! I hate it that she takes advantage of me like that. I'm sick of working overtime just because she has a boyfriend. Maybe I should get a different job. I hope I can get Mark to school on time! Ohhh, my whole day is already ruined!

**AGGRESSIVE EXAMPLE:**

**Audrey:** Good morning, Sara! It's a lovely day isn't it?

**Sara:** (with arms crossed) I don't see anything good about it! You're late again for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time this week:

**Audrey:** I guess I am a teensy bit late. Sorry about that!

**Sara:** You are so irresponsible! It's not my fault you're out all night with your new boyfriend. And all you do is jabber about him all the time. You don't even care about this job!

**Audrey:** That's not all I talk about! Besides, what's 5 or 10 minutes to you? All you have to do is go home and sleep!

**Sara:** You're making me really mad! You have no idea what it takes to work here all night and work at home all day! I'm going to call the boss and let him know that you're always late. I hope you get fired!

**Audrey:** Well then, how about I tell the boss about you being asleep when I came to work last week?

**Sara:** Go right ahead. See if I care!

(Sara stalks away.)

**ASSERTIVE EXAMPLE:**

**Audrey:** Good morning, Sara. It's a lovely morning, isn't it? How did everything go last night?

**Sara:** It was pretty quiet. Gary got up a couple of times—I think he's excited about today being his birthday.

**Audrey:** I'm sure we'll have a great party for him today—I'm picking up his cake after everyone goes to the activity center.

**Sara:** Before I leave I need to talk to you about something.

**Audrey:** Oh, what about?

**Sara:** I feel really stressed when I can't leave here on time. When I'm late, I don't have enough time to get my son up and ready for school. He's missed the school bus a couple of times lately.

**Audrey:** I guess I have been a teensy bit late a couple of times. Sorry about that.

**Sara:** Thanks for understanding my situation. Can I count on you to be on time?

**Audrey:** No problem. I had no idea you were on such a tight schedule!

**Sara:** See you tomorrow, Audrey. Enjoy the birthday party!

# Training Materials Checklist

*[For this training, you will need:*

- *Laptop computer (recommended)*
- *MS PowerPoint (PPT Viewer can be downloaded for free at Microsoft.com)*
- *Smartboard, LCD Projector, or similar device for PPT and videos (recommended)*
- *Passive, Aggressive, Assertive Video (download from training website)*
- *Flip chart and markers*
- *Printed Participant Guides*
- *Pens or pencils*
- *Evaluation (optional)*
- *Certificate of completion (optional)]*