

Assertiveness Training: Let Your Voice Be Heard!

*Improve Your Communication Skills
for Better Outcomes*



caregivers

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

PARTICIPANT GUIDE

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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.

Passive

- 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

- 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

- 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

- 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?*”

Do's and Don'ts

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

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

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 with “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



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).

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.

Scene One

1. Which communication approach did Sara (the overnight caregiver) choose to use with Audrey (who was late)?
2. Why do you think so?

Scene Two

1. Which communication approach did Sara (the overnight caregiver) choose this time to use with Audrey (who was late)?
2. Why do you think so?

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

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?

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

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 3rd 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!