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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 | |

✓ Quick Tips

The tone of voice you use for reflections is important. Use a tone that comes across as a statement, with a bit of uncertainty. Your goal is to express: "I think this is what you're telling me, but correct me if I'm wrong." Your reflections don't have to be perfect. If the other person corrects you, that's good! Now you have a better understanding of what they're trying to say.

Try to reflect emotions, even if the person you're listening to didn't clearly describe them. You may be able to pick up on how they feel by their tone of voice or body language.

Switch up your phrasing, or your reflections *will* start to sound forced. Try some of these:

- "I hear you saying that..."
- "It sounds like you feel..."
- "You're telling me that..."

Focus on reflecting the main point. Don't worry too much about all the little details, especially if the speaker had a lot to say.

🎯 Practice

"I was in a bad mood yesterday because work has been so stressful. I just can't keep up with everything I have to do."

Reflection:

"I feel like I'm doing all of the work around the house. I need you to help me clean and do the dishes more often."

Reflection:

"I've been worried when you don't answer your phone. I always think something might've happened to you."

Reflection:

"I don't understand what she wants from me. First she says she wants one thing, then another."

Reflection: