

BEING ASSERTIVE:

REDUCE STRESS,
COMMUNICATE BETTER



Being assertive is a core communication skill. Assertiveness can help you express yourself effectively and stand up for your point of view. It can also help you do this while respecting the rights and beliefs of others.

Being assertive can also help boost your self-esteem and earn others' respect. This can help with stress management. It may especially help you reduce stress if you tend to take on too many responsibilities because you have a hard time saying no.

Some people seem to be naturally assertive. But if you're not assertive, you can learn to be.

WHY ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION MAKES SENSE

Because assertiveness is based on mutual respect, it's an effective and diplomatic communication style. Being assertive shows that you respect yourself because

you're willing to stand up for your interests and express your thoughts and feelings. It also demonstrates that you're aware of others' rights and willing to work on resolving conflicts.

Of course, it's not just what you say — your message — but also how you say it that's important. Assertive communication is direct and respectful. Being assertive gives you the best chance of successfully delivering your message. If you communicate in a way that's too passive or too aggressive, your message may get lost because people are too busy reacting to your delivery.

ASSERTIVE VS. PASSIVE BEHAVIOR

If your style is passive or nonassertive, you may seem to be shy or overly easygoing. You may routinely say things such as “I’ll just go with whatever the group decides.” You tend to avoid conflict. Why is that a problem? Because the message you’re sending is that your thoughts and feelings aren’t as important as those of other people. In essence, when you’re too passive, you allow others to ignore your wants and needs.

Consider this example: You say yes when a colleague asks you to take over a project, even though you’re already busy. The extra work means you’ll have to work overtime and miss your daughter’s soccer game. Your intention may be to keep the peace. But always saying yes can poison your relationships. And worse, it may cause you internal conflict because your needs and those of your family always come second.

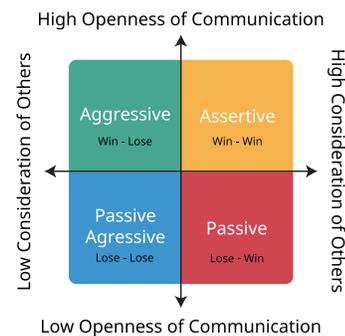
The internal conflict that can be created by passive behavior can lead to:

- Stress
- Resentment
- Seething anger
- Feelings of victimization
- Desire to exact revenge
- Doubting or questioning our own judgment

ASSERTIVE VS. AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

Now consider the other side. If your style is aggressive, you may come across as a bully who ignores others’ needs, feelings and opinions. You may appear self-righteous or superior. Very aggressive people embarrass, intimidate and scare others and may even be physically threatening.

You may think that being aggressive gets you what you want. However, it comes at a cost. Aggression weakens trust and mutual respect. Others may come to resent you, leading them to avoid or oppose you.



ASSERTIVE VS. PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

Now consider passive-aggressive behavior. If you communicate in a passive-aggressive manner, you may say yes when you want to say no. You may be sarcastic or complain about others behind their backs. Rather than confront an issue directly, you may show your anger and feelings through your actions or negative attitude. You may have developed a passive-aggressive style because you’re uncomfortable being direct about your needs and feelings.

What are the drawbacks of a passive-aggressive communication style? Over time, passive-aggressive behavior damages relationships and weakens mutual respect. This makes it difficult for you to get your goals and needs met.

THE BENEFITS OF BEING ASSERTIVE

Being assertive is usually viewed as a healthier communication style. Assertiveness offers many benefits. It helps you keep people from taking advantage of you. It can also help you from acting like a bully to others.

Behaving assertively can help you:

- Gain self-confidence and self-esteem
- Gain a sense of empowerment
- Understand and recognize your feelings
- Earn respect from others
- Improve communication
- Create win-win situations
- Improve your decision-making skills
- Create honest relationships
- Gain more job satisfaction