

Are you a Passive, Aggressive, or Assertive Communicator?

Do you find yourself frustrated when you feel you are not being heard? Do you get upset when your partner didn't hear what you just said? Do you get into arguments with loved ones only to find out that they misunderstood what you were actually saying? If you answered 'yes' to any of these questions, then you may benefit from reading this article on how to communicate effectively.

There are different types of communication. Communication is key to healthy relationship building. Think about it: *Life is about relationships and relationships are about communicating.* Without healthy communicating, relationships (and your emotional wellness) can suffer.

There are 3 types of verbal communication: passive, aggressive and assertive.

Passive communication is a submissive way of communicating. It is unhealthy because it means you're not respecting your own needs, which can lead to feelings of resentment, anger and mental exhaustion.

Aggressive communication is also unhealthy as it does not respect the other person's needs. It is a 'bullying' type of communicating, a form of dominance.

Assertive communication, on the other hand, is healthy because it is a form of communicating that respects each person's needs, which leads to trust and comfort.

Using statements that start with "I" is a respectful (assertive) way of communicating and allows you to own your feelings and thoughts. It also avoids blaming and attacking someone else.

A statement like "I feel hurt when you come home 2 hours late and don't let me know ahead of time" is more respectful and effective than an aggressive statement like "You are so inconsiderate for always being late coming home." This is shaming and attacking, which leads to the 'flight/fight/freeze' reaction. This leads to the frontal lobe of the brain 'shutting down', so logic and judgment and consequences don't function, which makes for a very ineffective conversation.

Aggressive ways of communicating (statements that are attacking and often start with "You...") can put the other person on the defensive, which also is ineffective in that the person may 'shut down' or attack back.

When you don't say anything that about something that is hurtful to you (being passive), then your needs are not being met, which can lead to emotional stress.

There are also nonverbal ways of communication: assumptions, expectations, misunderstandings, and agreements.

A lot of heated discussions and hurt feelings can be avoided in any relationship if we set up agreements ahead of time instead of assuming or expecting someone to do something or act a certain way. For example, if you don't want your guest smoking in your house, don't make an assumption that the smoker knows your concerns. Otherwise, it can create an uncomfortable situation when the smoker starts smoking in your house. You can prevent this stress by making an agreement ahead of time for the guest to step outside to smoke. An assertive statement may be, "I know that you enjoy smoking at our get-togethers, and it is important for me to have a fresh-smelling house, so I would like it if you smoke outside."

It's also important to be clear and honest about your intentions, and to avoid being evasive with your needs, or think that the other person can 'read your mind'. I had a client who had a hard day at work and just wanted to come home and not have to cook. She wanted her husband to take her out to dinner that night. When he got home from work, she said "I am so tired. I had such a bad day at work." He then replied, "Oh no, why don't you go to bed early tonight?" She got angry with his reply, wanting him to say instead "Why don't we go out for dinner tonight to give you a break?" He didn't know why she became upset with him. If she'd said, "I had a really hard day at work today and don't feel like cooking. I would love it if we could just go out to eat tonight," it would have been a clearer and honest message, and she could have avoided the stress that ensued.

Agreements are very effective and easy in any type of relationship and they avoid needless stress and misunderstandings. Practicing healthy ways of communicating is a valuable part of life in any situation at home, work, school, or in the community. It teaches us to be respectful of our needs and the needs of others, which creates a healthier state of mind for those who practice this way of communicating.

Cindy Saleeby Goulding, MS, LPC, NCC, CPT, CWC