

Understanding Assertiveness

Goal

Increase understanding of assertive communication as compared to passive and aggressive communication and reflect on personal assertiveness

Getting Ready

Gather

- Pens/Pencils, Markers, Chart Paper
- Optional: Music
- For Extension (if applicable): Journals/Notebook Paper

Prepare

- Copy "Measuring My Assertiveness" Participant Handout, one per participant.
- Write "Passive Communication," "Assertive Communication" and "Aggressive Communication" on different pieces of chart paper.
- Review "Passive, Assertive Or Aggressive Scenarios" Facilitator Resource, then choose which scenarios to use.
- Review *Raccoon Circle Reflection*.
- For Extension (if applicable): Review *Journal Reflection* and write questions on board/chart paper.

Knowing Yourself & Your Teens

How comfortable are you communicating assertively?

How is assertiveness viewed in participants' cultures? What messages might they have received about passive, assertive or aggressive communication?

Consider how to support participants who struggle with understanding the differences between communication styles.

MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES

-  Interpersonal
-  Intrapersonal
-  Body/Kinesthetic
-  Verbal/Linguistic
-  Visual/Spatial
-  Musical/Rhythmic

B

Show participants the pieces of chart paper reading “Passive,” “Assertive” and “Aggressive.”

Ask

- Who is familiar with these words?
- Where have you heard them?

Ask (write responses on chart paper)

- How would you define these words?

If participants do not identify the following, add

- Passive—not expressing your feelings, wants and needs
- Assertive—expressing your feelings, wants and needs in a way that is respectful of others
- Aggressive—demanding your needs and wants are met, no matter what it takes

Ask

- Is anyone familiar with the term passive-aggressive? What does it mean?

Share

- Passive-aggressive means being aggressive but in a quieter, less obvious way.
- It can include things like being sarcastic, talking behind someone’s back, starting rumors, saying something rude with a smile on your face, or ignoring someone.

Ask

- Do young people your age use passive-aggressive communication? How? When?

E

Share

- We’re going to do an activity to help us better understand the differences between passive, assertive and aggressive communication.
- We will include passive-aggressive with aggressive communication.

Hang the “Passive,” “Assertive” and “Aggressive” chart papers in different sections of the room and have participants stand.

Share

- I’m going to read some scenarios.
- Think about the scenario and whether you think it is an example of passive, assertive or aggressive communication.
- Stand by the piece of chart paper that you think describes what happened in the scenario.

Read scenarios from the “Passive, Assertive or Aggressive Scenarios” Facilitator Resource.

After each scenario, ask

- Why are you standing where you are?

Share the correct category for the scenario and ask

- What makes this scenario passive/assertive/aggressive?
- What might be the consequences of choosing this type of response in this situation?

Read and discuss as many scenarios as you have time for.

R/D

Ask

- How easy or difficult was it to decide whether a scenario was passive, assertive or aggressive?
- Which scenarios were most challenging? Why?

E

Pass out the “Measuring My Assertiveness” Participant Handout, one per participant.

Share

- Let’s reflect on our own communication.
- Read the statements on this handout and check whether they are “almost always,” “sometimes” or “almost never” true of you.
- Please answer honestly. I will not ask you to share your results or turn in this handout.

FACILITATOR TIP



Consider whether it would be helpful for you to read the statements aloud one by one for participants to follow along.

If participants are reading the statements on their own, consider playing music while they work.

When participants have finished, share

- Add up the number of “Almost Always” responses you have and write that number in the “Total” box.
- The closer to 12 your total is, the more assertive you are according to the items on this survey.
- We know that this survey is not a complete list of assertiveness behaviors and it is not meant to judge you.
- It’s a tool that can help us learn more about ourselves.
- Assertiveness is very challenging; most people do not have a full total of 12 on this survey.

+ Extension goes here

R/D/A

Ask

- Why do you think we are focusing on assertiveness?

If participants do not identify the following, add

- Assertiveness is often in a person’s best interest, because it helps them ask for what they need or want, as well as say no when they need or want to.

Ask

- Does being assertive mean someone will always get what they want?
- Are there times when being passive can protect someone’s safety?
- If someone has said “Yes” to something in the past, is it okay to change their mind and start saying “No”? (Yes—we always have the right to change our mind.)

Using a *Raccoon Circle Reflection*, ask

- In real life, what factors contribute to whether someone responds to a situation in a passive, assertive or aggressive way?
- How do emotions influence communication?
- How can a person's age, gender or culture effect how assertive they are?
- How are passive, assertive and aggressive communication shown in the media?

Extension

Using a *Journal Reflection*, ask

- How do you feel about your total on this survey?
- How assertive do you think you are?
- What can you do to practice assertiveness?
- Can you think of a time when you handled a situation passively or aggressively? What happened?
- If you could change how you handled the situation, would you? What would you do differently?



FACILITATOR TIP



Consider playing music while participants work.

Passive, Assertive or Aggressive Scenarios

Instructions

- Choose a variety of scenarios to use. (All scenarios do not need to be used, but choose a mixture across the categories and read them in random order.)
- Change details as appropriate for your group.
- Choose scenarios your participants will identify with.
- As necessary, create additional scenarios relevant to participants in your community.

Passive

It really seems like one of your teachers is being unfair. Every time one of the boys shouts out an answer, he lets it go, but when a girl shouts out an answer, he reminds her to raise her hand and be patient. You stop answering questions in his class and pay less and less attention to what he says.

You have a group science project. One person doesn't show up to work on it at the time your group arranged. You text them but they don't reply. The group finishes the project and when you bring it to school, the person walks over to add their name. You don't feel like it's fair for them to get credit, but you don't know what to say, so you just swallow your anger and let them sign.

You feel like a snack, so you go to the store to get some chips. You can see through the store window that there's something going on inside. There are 3 people looking tense and yelling at each other and the staff person looks nervous. You pause, because even though you really want the chips, you don't want to get involved in anything else. The situation looks like it could get out of control quickly, so you decide to pass on the chips and just go home.

While you are eating lunch with some friends, one of your friends suggests skipping school for the afternoon. You feel uncomfortable and don't think it's a good idea. Even though you don't want to go, when they get up to leave and say "Come on, are you ready?" you go along with them and leave the building.

Assertive

You've been dating someone for awhile and everyone sees you as a great couple. However, you're not really into the relationship anymore and want to be single. When you two are walking home together, you explain that you feel like it's time to break up. When they try to talk you out of it and ask you to reconsider, you calmly explain that you feel sure about your decision and that you respect them and don't want to lead them on.

Your favorite electronics store is giving out free headphones, really nice ones, to the first 25 customers to buy something on Saturday morning. You are pretty sure you are in the first 25, but it's going to be close—you might be number 24 or 25. The person in front of you lets 2 people cut in front of them. You speak up and calmly say, "Excuse me—I don't think it's fair for people to cut in line when others have been waiting to get the free headphones."

You and your sister share a room. You hate that she always leaves it a mess, including leaving food wrappers on the floor. Lately, you have found a few bugs in the room. One night you say "I've found a few bugs in here lately, which grosses me out. Can we please agree to throw all the food trash in the kitchen garbage?"

Your friend borrowed \$20 last week and said they would pay you back on Monday. It's Wednesday and they haven't said anything about it. You are nervous that they forgot, so you say "Hey, do you have the \$20 I loaned you? I'd like to have it before the weekend."

Your math teacher seems to be going really fast in class. You are totally lost and don't understand the equation they are talking about. You ask a question in class, but you're still confused and you don't know how you will do your homework. You go talk to the teacher after school and say "I was really confused about the equation we talked about today. Can you explain it to me again? I want to make sure I can do my homework."

Aggressive

Every time you speak up in meetings at work, an adult coworker rudely interrupts you. You're sick of it and frustrated that the manager doesn't say anything. You finally snap and stand up, face your coworker and shout "You know what? I'm talking here! I'm sorry that you don't hear me or care about what I have to say, but you owe me some respect, even if I'm younger than you and only work here part-time."

You hear that someone has been spreading rumors about your sister and you decide to confront them to defend her reputation. When you see them after school, you approach them, shove them and say "Don't ever think you can spread rumors about my sister again. Mind your own business."

You and your best friend are talking about religion and get into a fight. You can't believe that she doesn't agree with you, and you are really angry. You want her to see your side and keep repeating your opinion, getting louder and louder. She can't get a word in. You shout "Don't try to tell me how you feel—I don't care! Listen to me, I know what I'm talking about here!"

You suspect the person you are in a relationship with is talking to someone else. You ask them about it and they tell you they are not talking to anyone else, only you. You say "Prove it—let me see your phone history." You reach over and snatch their phone out of their hand, knocking their keys to the floor at the same time and start looking at their text messages to see who they have messaged recently.

Passive Aggressive

Your friend is really getting on your nerves—for the last month, she has been ditching you to hang out with her new boyfriend. You are both planning to hang out with a group tonight and when she texts the group to cancel, you feel really frustrated. You start a new group text without her and text "Guess we're not good enough for Ms. New Boyfriend anymore. Ditched again. Whatever."

Measuring My Assertiveness

Instructions

- Read each statement and put a "✓" in the column that best describes your response.

Almost Always	Sometimes	Almost Never	Statement
			If I disagree with a friend, I say so, even if it means we'll argue.
			When someone asks me to do something that I do not think is in my best interest, I say "no."
			I talk with my friends about my views on important things, even if their views are different.
			If a friend wants me to do something that I really don't want to do, I feel comfortable saying "no."
			When I don't understand what someone is telling me, I ask questions.
			When someone hurts my feelings or makes me angry, I talk with them and explain how I feel.
			When there is something a friend can help me with, I ask them for help.
			I am able to stand up to peer pressure.
			I feel comfortable asking teachers, health professionals and other adults for help.
			I can make my point without pushing, shoving, yelling, or getting in someone's face.
			I can explain the reasons for my decisions and stick with them, even if someone else disagrees.
			If a friend had borrowed something and not returned it, I would ask them about it.

TOTAL

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