

# ASSERTIVENESS



# Communication Styles

## *Communication Styles*

The four main styles of communication are (1) the passive style, (2) the aggressive style, (3) the passive-aggressive style, and (4) the assertive style. In this chapter, we'll look at the verbal and nonverbal aspects of each communication style. In doing so, we'll be able to identify which style we use most often. It's important to remember that no one uses one specific style at all times. Most of us use different ways of communicating, depending on the situation we're in or on the people we're with. Usually, however, one style best describes our *overall* behavior.

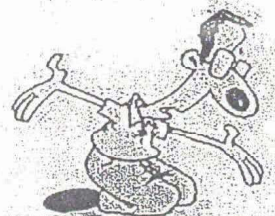
Keep in mind, too, that our communication style is something we've learned. If we see ourselves using a style we don't like or that's interfering with our relationships, we can take steps to learn a new technique.



### **Passive Style**

When we communicate *passively*, we try to avoid conflict and confrontation with others at all cost. This means that we often put our personal beliefs and rights aside to support the rights of someone else. We don't share our true feelings, wants, and needs, which makes us emotionally dishonest. We may think that our behavior doesn't cause any harm-after all, we're doing everything possible not to upset anyone-but we're mistaken. Our behavior lowers our self-esteem and leaves our needs unmet. Because most people never address our needs, we may feel neglected and build up feelings of resentment. This creates strained relationships, as we expect others to guess what we feel, want, and need.

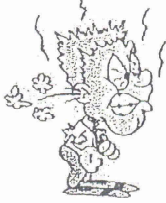
Passive communicators tend to speak quietly. We don't use much expression or inflection in our voices. We try not to sound too excited or too upset about anything. We attempt to "soften" the content of our message, and we avoid saying what we really feel or think. We have difficulty saying no. We use statements such as "maybe," "probably," or "I suppose" often because we don't want to commit to anything. Neither do we want to be too extreme, so we qualify what we say with statements like "kind of" and "sort of." Or we use communication stoppers-"I don't care" or "whatever"-to avoid taking a stand or making a decision that someone else might disagree with. We may try to smooth over problems by over-apologizing. We also have a hard time accepting or giving compliments, or both. While our quiet style makes us good listeners, we have difficulty giving direct, honest feedback.





## Aggressive Style

When we communicate *aggressively*, we put our own rights first and disregard the rights of others. We don't show concern for the feelings, wants, and needs of others, but we demand that ours be heard and met. We will do almost anything to get what we want, even if it means controlling and manipulating others. Although we may get what we want, our aggressive behavior leads to poor self-esteem, unhealthy relationships, and, in many cases, guilt and shame.



Aggressive communicators speak with a loud voice or an unfriendly tone. We're able to say no easily, without considering the needs of others. We use "you" statements to blame, to threaten, and to coerce others. We're not afraid to swear or to call people names if it'll help us get our way. We also tend to bark out judgmental statements, such as "you should....," "you'd better....," or "you are...." We focus on the faults of other people. We sometimes resort to racist, sexist, and other prejudiced statements. We demand what we want when we want it. We easily accept compliments but have difficulty giving them. We make poor listeners because we interrupt and give feedback in the form of criticism or unwanted advice.



## Passive-Aggressive Style



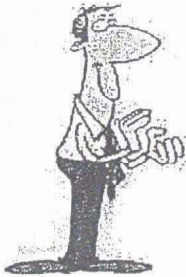
This style blends components from the passive style and the aggressive style. When we use the *passive-aggressive* style, we violate or disregard the rights of others (like the aggressive person) while attempting to look as though we're placing the rights of others first (like the passive person). We seem concerned about others' feelings, wants, and needs but will only act on them to meet our own feelings, wants, and needs. We do not tell others what we want or feel; instead we expect others to guess and to give in to us. We act this way to control and manipulate others (like the aggressive person) and to avoid direct conflict (like the passive person). This behavior causes the same negative effects as the passive and the aggressive styles create: We have poor self-esteem and have difficulty in relationships (like both the passive and the aggressive communicators). Our needs and feelings may go unmet and unacknowledged (like those of the passive person), and we may experience feelings of shame and guilt about our behavior (like the aggressive person).

Our voice may be soft and calm when making a threat. We use sarcasm and aggressive statements but don't admit that we're serious. Instead we suggest that the person we're talking to "takes everything too seriously." We say yes when we don't plan to follow through, or we give dishonest feedback to humiliate or to "set up" another person.

## Assertive Style

This style of communication allows us to affirm our own rights as well as the rights of others. We're able to express our feelings, wants, and needs openly and respectfully as they occur. We act in our own best interest without trying to make others uncomfortable. When we communicate, we're open to hearing others express their feelings and needs and are willing to compromise. We maintain a balance between giving, taking, and asking for help. We try to resolve issues without conflict and to work through them when they occur.

The benefits of assertive communication include strong self-esteem, self-respect, and self-confidence. We make good leaders and good friends. Our relationships last longer and are based on mutual respect. We are honest, which is the foundation of our recovery.



We use a conversational voice tone but may use inflection for emphasis. We are able to say no without guilt and with respect for the other person. We use "I" statements to take personal responsibility for our feelings and opinions, such as "I feel afraid when..." and "I feel angry when..." We avoid blaming others and take responsibility for our actions. We can take credit for success and admit our mistakes. We make decisions and set limits. We are good listeners who offer direct and honest feedback.



## **Identifying Communication Styles**

Use the descriptions of the different communication styles to respond to each of the following situations.

### **Situation A**

You are a nonsmoker. You go to lunch with a friend who is a smoker. You enjoy this person's company, but do not like the smoke.

**Passive response**

**Aggressive response**

**Passive-Aggressive response**

**Assertive response**

### **Situation B**

You and a couple of friends made plans to go to dinner and a movie tonight. Chuck calls to tell you a different group of people won tickets to a once-in-a-lifetime, sold-out concert and invited him to go along. The show is tonight. He and his wife want to go to the concert instead of dinner and the movie, if it's okay with you. You really don't want them to go to the concert.

**Passive response**

**Aggressive response**

**Passive-Aggressive response**

**Assertive response**

### **Situation C**

You just earned your 30-day chip for sobriety. A friend who has been in prison for many years has just been released and invites you to go to a bar. You go with your friend, but when you go into the bar he leaves you alone to go talk to other people. You are uncomfortable and don't know anyone else in the place.

**Passive response**

**Aggressive response**

**Passive-Aggressive response**

**Assertive response**



# Self-Assessment

Now that we're more familiar with each of the styles, we can look more honestly at our own ways of communicating. This section is an informal self-assessment to help us identify our primary communication style. Again, it's important to remember that we each use different styles at different times.

After answering the questions, we'll be asked to add up our score. The score measures passive, aggressive, and assertive styles. If our passive and aggressive scores are nearly tied, this indicates we use the passive-aggressive style most often.


Remember, this tool will help us determine which style of communication we use most. There are no right or wrong answers and the outcome doesn't affect our ability to benefit from this training.

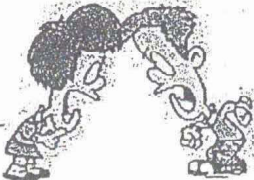


# My Communication Style

Read each statement that follows. Place a check mark in the area that best describes how often the statement reflects your style. When finished, use the score sheet to see your results.

Communication Style	Hardly Ever	Sometimes	Almost Always
	0 or 1 time per week	2-5 times per week	5 or more times per week

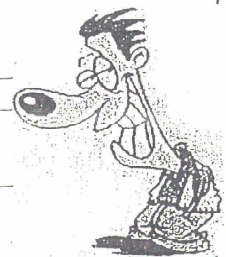
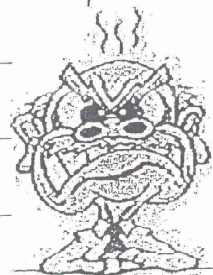
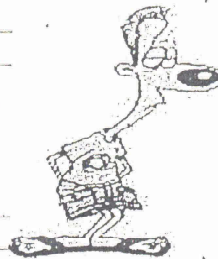
1. I like to get compliments because I deserve them and because others should notice my success, but I don't give many compliments.			
2. I allow my rights to be violated. 			

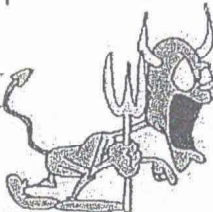
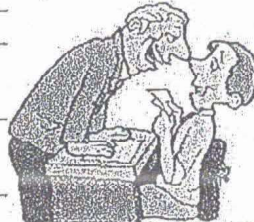

3. I have difficulty listening to others and interrupt when they are speaking to get my point across.			
4. I am a good listener and people like to talk to me about everything, but I have difficulty talking about myself and giving honest feedback.			
5. I don't like conflict but am able to work it out by talking openly.			
6. I stare at people to get them to listen to me. 			

7. When I speak, I use my hands to emphasize important points.			
8. When there is conflict or tension, I withdraw and try to avoid it.			
9. When I have a need or want, I'm able to tell other people what it is.			
10. I'm able to talk about my feelings openly using "feeling" words.			



Communication Style	Hardly Ever	Sometimes	Almost Always
	0 or 1 time per week	2-5 times per week	5 or more times per week
11. When I have a strong opinion about something, I don't express it unless someone else has the same one.			
12. I tend to feel dissatisfied after conversations because I didn't say what I wanted to say.			
13. I tend to feel unhappy after conversations, because it seems as if I may have hurt someone or that there are unresolved issues.			
14. When complimented, I can easily accept it, say "thank you," and feel pleased with myself. I also give sincere compliments to others.			
15. When complimented, I tend to say it was no big deal or that it was not that good.			
16. I tend to look down or around to avoid eye contact in general.			
17. When I talk about my anger or hurt, I let my feelings show on my face.			
18. When I have something to say, I wait For others to stop talking before Offering my opinion.			
19. When I speak, I use a tone of voice that is easy to hear.			
20. I usually slouch and disappear or close myself off to others with my body posture.			
21. When I am hurt or angry I talk about it with a smile or laugh about it.			
22. I like to stay away from people and look for a seat far from others.			



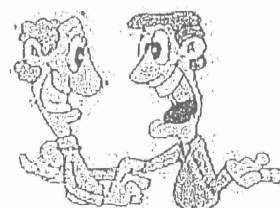
Communication Style	Hardly Ever 0 or 1 time per week	Sometimes 2-5 times per week	Almost Always 5 or more times per week
23. I am comfortable with how I communicate with others.			
24. When I speak, my hands are all over. People have to back up to give me room.			
25. When I speak, my voice is loud and overpowering, especially when I'm angry or making an important point.			
26. I don't mind conflict. In fact, I start it sometimes just for the challenge. I'm the "devils advocate."			
27. I stand up for my rights without disrespecting the rights of others.			
28. When I speak, my voice is soft and others have difficulty hearing me.			
29. When I need or want something, I will demand that others do it for me.			
30. When I talk, I tend to move in very close. The other person steps back.			
31. I stand or sit in a relaxed manner.			
32. I sit stretched out, taking up a lot of space.			
33. When I'm angry, I break things, slam doors, or use profanity.			
34. I try to stand or sit a comfortable distance from the person I'm talking to.			
35. When I'm angry, I tense up and act like I'm going to hit something.			
36. When I want something I hint to others so they will guess and I don't have to ask.			
37. I make sure I get what I want.			



Communication Style	Hardly Ever	Sometimes	Almost Always
	0 or 1 time per week	2-5 times per week	5 or more times per week

38. I am able to look people "in the eye" When talking or listening.			
39. When I have something to say, I will interrupt to get my point across.			
40. I usually do not share my feelings.			

41. When I speak, I don't use many gestures.			
42. I'm a good listener and give honest feedback.			



# Score Sheet

## Section A: Assertiveness Points

Tally your responses for the following question numbers:

5, 7, 9, 10, 14, 17, 18, 19, 23, 27, 31, 34, 38, 42

Almost Always	_____	x	8	=	_____
Sometimes	_____	x	6	=	_____
Hardly Ever	_____	x	4	=	_____
Total				=	_____

## Section B: Passiveness Points

Tally your responses for the following question numbers. In this section disregard any question answered with **HARDLY EVER**.

2, 4, 8, 11, 12, 15, 16, 20, 21, 28, 36, 40, 41

Almost Always	_____	x	2	=	_____
Sometimes	_____	x	1	=	_____
Total				=	_____

## Section C: Aggressiveness Points

Tally your responses for the following question numbers. In this section disregard any question answered with **HARDLY EVER**.

1, 3, 6, 13, 24, 25, 26, 29, 30, 32, 33, 35, 37, 39

Almost Always	_____	x	2	=	_____
Sometimes	_____	x	1	=	_____
Total				=	_____

Add the totals from sections B and C. \_\_\_\_\_

Subtract the totals of B and C from the total in section A. \_\_\_\_\_

**This is your assertiveness score.**

(There is a possible score of 112 points.)

### Assertiveness Score 0-35

You will make maximum gains from learning assertiveness skills.

### 36-80

You have some useful assertiveness skills but will benefit from further training.

### 81-112

Good Skills! Let's refresh and refine.