

Change Your Way To Health!



Understanding the difference between assertive and aggressive communication

We have all had times when we failed to speak up for ourselves—said yes when we wanted to say no, or let someone invalidate our feelings. We may have had other times when we were accused of being overbearing or even rude when that was not our intention. Knowing how to be assertive, to say what we need or want while respecting the needs and rights of others, is an important component of interpersonal communications.

By understanding the differences between assertive and aggressive communication styles, we can feel better about ourselves and create stronger, more mutually respectful relationships.

Tips

Assertiveness requires that we maintain control of our emotions. Our communication style will be viewed as aggressive if emotions get the better of us resulting in a raised voice, strong language, or intimidating body language.

Assertive people are considerate of others, and are dedicated to helping others reach their goals and achieving a win-win scenario through compromise. Aggressive people often say to themselves, "I am going to win and I do not care if you get what you want."

Assertive people are mindful of personal boundaries, are able to tell others how they want to be treated, and to let other people know if they are acting in ways that are not acceptable. Aggressive people might make their boundaries clear, but may appear to others as rude and condescending when doing so.

Assertiveness involves owning one's power which allows for direct, open, and honest communications. On the other hand, being aggressive may be a response to feeling powerless; thus, the person may employ threats, sarcasm, or bullying when speaking with others.

When we are being assertive, we make an effort to show respect for the other person, and if we should cross the line we apologize and make amends. Alternatively, aggressive people may be disrespectful and often times can be intentionally manipulative, demeaning, and unwilling to forgive.

Assertive people take a constructive approach, are interested in receiving feedback, and will consciously work at retaining or improving the relationship. Aggressive people have difficulty accepting criticism, leaving others feeling resentful and not wanting to pursue an ongoing relationship.



Sometimes people who have difficulty being assertive can end up being taken advantage of and can be perceived as a pushover. When these more passive types have had enough they may push back too hard and come across as more aggressive than intended.

By working with the following tips, you can teach yourself to communicate more assertively. Keep in mind, however, if you are more likely to resort to anger, an anger management course might be in order. At the other end of the spectrum, if your tendency is to be too passive, you may benefit from some formal training in assertiveness.

Tips

Practice. Write in a journal or talk in front of a mirror in order to practice what you might say in a difficult situation. Imagine different scenarios where you would feel uncomfortable, defensive, fearful, distraught, or angry and how you might respond in an assertive way.

Learn to say "no." This is an area where most people who are not naturally assertive have difficulties. Often times, because these individuals do not want to disappoint or anger someone, "yes" is often an automatic response. If you want to or need to say "no", keep in mind that most people are happy to accept an honest "no" if expressed with sincerity.

Listen. The ability to be assertive requires taking the viewpoint of others into consideration. To understand others, you need to listen to the underlying message they are trying to communicate through their verbal and non-verbal cues.

Watch your body language. Much of our personal communication occurs through our body language. If you want to be perceived as a confident and positive person, it helps to sit up straight, avoid hand wringing or other nervous gestures, and always maintain eye contact.

Keep emotions in check. To avoid letting your emotions get the better of you, take a deep breath before speaking or allow for some time to collect your thoughts. You want to ensure your voice will be confident, neutral, and without negative emotion.

Use "I" not "You." Rather than saying something like, "You are wrong," instead say "I feel differently". This is much less accusatory and allows you to take ownership of the situation.

We want your questions, comments, and suggestions.

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