



Being Assertive Without Being Aggressive

Materials:

- Worksheet

Brainstorm: What is the difference between being assertive and being aggressive?

Accept responses and write down on the whiteboard.

Discuss: There are three main styles of communication: Passive, Assertive, and Aggressive. Passive behavior thinks that “I don’t matter”. The main benefit of passive behavior is that it tends to avoid unpleasant situations. The challenge is that personal needs are not met, resentment may build up and there may be feelings of low self-esteem. Aggressive behavior thinks that “You don’t matter”. The benefit from this thinking is that their anger often helps them to achieve their short term goals. The problem arises when they alienate others through their behavior and may begin to feel isolated and frustrated with a lack of connection with others. An alternative to both these strategies is Assertive behavior, who thinks “we both matter”. The payoff of this type of behavior is that most goals are achieved along with feelings of self-worth and improved relationships. The downside may be that dealing with people who use the passive or aggressive behavior style of communication may still be a challenge.

Dive in! One way to communicate from an assertive point of view is to use “I” statements. I statements usually begin with the word “I”. For example, “I feel” or, “I get upset because” or “I’m looking forward to”. I statements are usually most effective when using a calm tone of voice. I statements are often perceived as effectively deescalating defensiveness in the other person. When we use “I” statements, we are taking responsibility for ourselves, our thoughts and our feelings, instead of blaming them on others. I statements are typically used in an assertive style of communication.



High School

The typical “I” statement is as follows:

I think _____ (what you think about the situation). I feel _____ (use an emotion word to describe your emotion), because _____ (why do you feel this way). I want _____ (your suggestion to solve the problem).

Remember... there is no YOU in an “I” statement. For example, I think that you’re wrong to yell at me. I feel frustrated because you yelled. I want you to stop yelling at me.

When we insert the word “you” in an I statement, it becomes an accusation rather than an assertive “I” statement. An accusation undermines the attempt to de-escalate the situation and often makes the other person feel defensive.

Activity Hand out the worksheet. Individually or in pairs, students will work on the statements to create “I” statements. When they have completed the worksheet. Share their responses with the class and discuss.

Reflect: What style of communication do I usually use? How might using “I” statements help my communication with others to get more of what I want?

Extend and Enrich

How can we use empathy to improve our communication?

<https://www.linkedin.com/business/talent/blog/talent-strategy/how-to-lead-with-empathy-and-compassion>

Professional Development: How am I using “I” statements in my communication? Which style of communication do I tend to use? How effective am I in my communication?