



Assertive Communication: A Healthier Way to Express Yourself

The way we choose to interact with those around us can have a big impact on our mental health. In general, there are three styles of communication that we can engage in when interacting with others. The three styles of communication include the aggressive style, the assertive style, and the passive style.

The aggressive style of communication is marked by a tendency to dominate others and disregard their opinions. Aggressive individuals have a tendency to argue or verbally threaten others in order to get their point across. This can lead to increased conflict and frustration. The passive communication style is on the other end of the spectrum. Passive individuals have a tendency to avoid conflict. Although avoiding or walking away may be necessary in some situations, continually being passive can lead to others pushing one around and essentially, it can lead to being submissive to dominant individuals. Despite the obvious negatives of these two communication styles, many people believe they must either resort to aggressive communication as a means of standing up for themselves or resort to passive communication as a means of avoiding conflict. The key to establishing a healthy style of communication, however, lies in finding the middle ground between these two styles.

The healthiest communication style is the assertive style. Assertive individuals stand up for themselves without disrespecting others. Assertive communication is characterized by expressing one's opinions using direct language. Key traits of assertiveness entail good posture and direct eye contact. Thus, rather than threaten others or shut down during a disagreement, assertive individuals are firm and let others know what they are thinking and how they are feeling in a respectful manner.

For more information on the mental health benefits of engaging in assertive communication as well as tips on how to become an assertive communicator, visit: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/think-act-be/201801/5-benefits-asserting-your-needs-and-how-start-today> or review the attached chart titled "Learning About Communication....Are you a Turtle, a Tiger or an Owl?"

If you would like more support on improving your communication skills, Palm Beach County Youth Services Department offers free therapy and parent education services to all residents of Palm Beach County with youth between the ages of 0-22. Services are offered in-person and via telehealth. Visit our website at www.pbcgov.com/youthservices/EducationCenter for additional information. To contact the Education & Training Center to schedule an appointment, please call 561-233-4460.

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**Understanding The Three Types of Communication
 Are you a Turtle, a Tiger or an Owl?**

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Non-Assertive	Aggressive	Assertive
<p>The Turtle</p> 	<p>The Tiger</p> 	<p>The Owl</p> 
<p>Turtle-like behavior includes avoidance, hiding, and self-protection to avoid getting hurt, being judged or facing rejection.</p>	<p>Tiger-like behavior is bossy, intimidating, fear-producing, retaliative, and forceful. A need to control make them lose control.</p>	<p>Owl-like behavior is wise, calm, astute, and prone to observe and behave judiciously rather over-react.</p>
<p>GOAL: To remain “under the radar” and play it safe and gain approval from others.</p>	<p>GOAL: To show you are right, to change other’s minds and behaviors, even at the expense of human relationships.</p>	<p>GOAL: To express oneself in hopes that others will change, but not demanding it - geared to “<i>express</i>”, not “<i>impress</i>.”</p>
<p>Does not freely express feelings and thoughts in fear of disapproval, being judged, or simply “rocking the boat.”</p>	<p>Uses “<i>You statements</i>” which are judgmental, controlling, disrespectful, and imposes ideas on others.</p>	<p>Uses “<i>I statements</i>” which are geared towards expressing oneself with tact and sharing ideas rather than imposing them on others.</p>
<p>Very sensitive to criticism, judgment and disapproval from others.</p>	<p>Insensitive to the feelings of others, self-righteous, but very sensitive to themselves</p>	<p>Sensitive to others and oneself, empathetic.</p>
<p>Self-denying and disrespectful of oneself.</p>	<p>Disrespectful of others, lacking empathy.</p>	<p>Respectful and empathetic to self and others.</p>
<p>Does not accept personal rights.</p>	<p>Violates the rights of others and acts irresponsibly, even if they “mean well.”</p>	<p>Balances personal rights with responsibilities to others.</p>
<p>Unhealthy ways of thinking to protect oneself.</p>	<p>They do not mean to be “bad,” and are often unaware they are unhealthy.</p>	<p>Mature and healthy ways of thinking and behaving.</p>
<p>Fearful of being wrong and of being seen as “stupid” or as a “failure.”</p>	<p>Is more concerned with being right than kind.</p>	<p>Is not concerned about being wrong or right - authenticity and honesty is most important.</p>
<p>Fear of other’s reaction leads to dishonesty and “beating around the bush.”</p>	<p>Blunt honesty and directness invades the personal boundaries of others.</p>	<p>Is honest and direct while being sensitive and tactful.</p>
<p>Plays it “safe” and does not take risks due to lack of confidence, insecurity and low self-esteem.</p>	<p>Over-confidence and self-righteousness is due to a sense of superiority (although often due to inner insecurity).</p>	<p>Is not afraid of interpersonal risks and the judgments of others due to high self esteem and a personal sense of security and self-love.</p>