

Learning Assertive Communication

What to Know

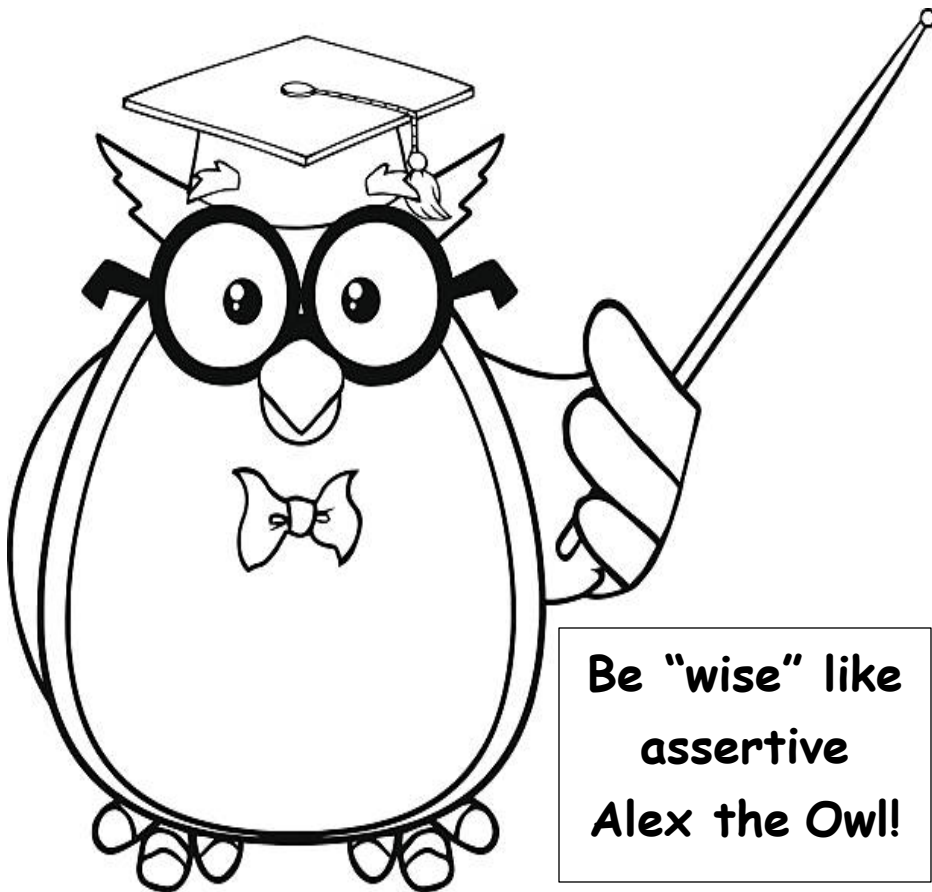
Assertive communication means you express your feelings in a respectful, clear, kind, and firm way. It's the best way to let others know how you're feeling and what you need. But even if you're assertive, there's no guarantee other people will respond how you'd like them to—but they are more likely to listen to what you have to say and respond in a positive manner. If you don't communicate assertively, you might be a passive or aggressive communicator. Take a look at the chart below.

Passive	Assertive	Aggressive
Fearful of rejection or other peoples' anger	Calm, collected, and more observant than reactive	Rude, bossy, and controlling
Goal: To play it safe so people like them	Goal: To express themselves honestly and kindly	Goal: To be right and prove it
Fearful of being yelled at or others using physical force	Firmly informs and is in control; respectful of others' needs	Uses verbal and sometimes physical force; focuses on own needs
Sensitive to disapproval and rejection; sometimes dishonest and disrespectful to self	Sensitive, honest, respectful, and caring	Insensitive and disrespectful
Allows personal rights to be violated	Balances personal rights with responsibility to others	Violates others' rights

Passive	Assertive	Aggressive
Keeps feelings inside; is fearful of being wrong or seeming "stupid"	Expresses feelings tactfully and is more concerned with being kind than being right	Freely expresses anger, needs to be right, and tends to judge others
Often feels sad, isolated, anxious, or misunderstood	Feels secure, confident, and loving	Feels superior and gets angry easily

Which type of communicator are you? _____

Maybe you aren't an assertive communicator—that's OK! Here are some things you can do to be more assertive.



Use the "nice no." You might feel pressured to go along with others. This might cause anxiety if you want to say no, but you're afraid how the other person will react. A simple technique for responding assertively to such requests is a "nice no." You might say, "Thanks for asking, but I'm not interested." Sometimes a simple "No, thanks," does the trick.

Set a boundary. Sometimes you might be asked to do things that are outside your comfort zone, such as when a classmate says, "Can I copy your essay?" Set a clear and firm boundary by saying, "No, I'm not comfortable

with that." You don't need to explain why or negotiate—just set a clear boundary and stick to it.

Ask for time to think. People sometimes ask questions you're not ready to answer. You might need more information or time to reflect on your feelings. You can ask for time to think it over by saying, "I'm not sure how to answer that right now. Can I get back to you later?" Be sure to ask for the amount of time you need, whether it's later the same day or next week.

Say what you need. You might have a misunderstanding with someone because you haven't communicated your needs clearly. You might think people ignore or disrespect your needs, but maybe they're simply not aware of them. You can solve this problem by stating your needs calmly. For example, you might say to a teacher, "Could you please repeat that? I don't understand the directions."

Use an "I feel" message. If you feel hurt by someone, you might respond by being aggressive, making an accusation, or withdrawing to protect yourself. But you can use an "I feel" message to communicate your feelings and emotional needs. You might say to a parent, "I feel sad when you can't attend my baseball games." This gives your parent the chance to understand how you feel.

Know how to respond to aggression. Sometimes when you communicate assertively, you receive an aggressive response. The best thing to do might be to calmly leave the conversation by saying something like, "I think I communicated my thoughts (or feelings) clearly, so there's not much more to talk about."

What to Do

Use scissors to cut out the statements on the next page. Decide which ones are passive, aggressive, or assertive. On the following page, tape or paste the statements in the appropriate column. Then answer the following questions.

"I felt uncomfortable when you said that to me."

Your friend is late again, and you say, "Why are you late again?"

You're nervous about making a mistake, so you remain silent.

"Why don't you just get over it!"

"You're too sensitive!"

"I feel like you hurt my feelings a lot, and you don't even know it."

Your friend ignores you at lunch.

You don't say anything when your brother's behavior bothers you.

You don't say anything because you know your sister will explode in anger.

You speak clearly and directly to your teacher.

Your friend is so bossy that you don't want to hang out with him anymore.

You look at the floor when you're speaking to your parents.

You interrupt your friend because you have something important to say.

You raise your hand and wait to be called on before you answer the question.

"When you raise your voice, I feel scared."

You will do anything to keep your friends happy.

Your friend pushes other kids around when she doesn't get her way.

"Let's talk about this instead of arguing about who's right."

"It doesn't matter what I want."

"No one cares what I think!"

"I don't care what you want! I want to do it this way."

You're afraid if you speak up no one will like you.

Even though you're uncomfortable, you speak honestly about what's upsetting you.

Aggressive

Passive

Assertive

Did this activity help you become a more assertive communicator? Why or why not?

What else can you do to speak and act more assertively? Be specific.

Is there someone who can help you practice this skill? Who?

The next time you are in a situation with an aggressive communicator, what will you do?

What is hard about communicating assertively? Why? Describe.

What can you do about this?
