

Identifying Your Communication Style

Objective

To identify your communication style in order to improve problematic relationships.

You Should Know

There are four basic styles of communication. Even though you might use different styles in different situations, usually you will fall back on one particular style.

- **Passive communication** prioritizes the needs, wants, and feelings of others—even at your own expense. Your communication tends to be inadequate and ineffective, and you do not appear to be confident or self-assured. Other people may take advantage of you because you do not stand up for yourself.
- **Aggressive communication** occurs when only your needs, wants, and feelings matter. You typically ignore other peoples' needs. You might use bullying or a loud or overbearing manner. Criticism, humiliation, disrespectful language, and/or domination with frequent interruptions are tools designed to control conversations.
- **Passive-aggressiveness communication** is the tendency to engage in indirect expressions of hostility through subtle insults, sullen behavior, and stubbornness. Sarcasm is often used as a way of masking your true feelings and opinions. You might use the “silent treatment” to try to make people feel guilty in order to get what you want.
- **Assertive communication** is the ability to express your opinions in an open, honest, and direct way. You take responsibility for yourself without judging or blaming other people. You express your ideas in a respectful manner, without being too aggressive or too passive. You use positive and courteous language. Research indicates that communicating in an assertive manner reduces stress, depression, and anxiety, and improves your self-esteem.

Understanding these four styles will help you understand why you might be having problems in different relationships. Once you are aware of your communication style, it is easier to identify areas that could be improved.

What to Do

To identify your style of communication, mark the answers that are true for you most of the time.

Section A

___ I allow others to deliberately or inadvertently infringe on my rights.

I have a hard time expressing my feelings, needs, or opinions.

I tend to speak softly or apologetically.

I have trouble making eye contact.

I often feel anxious because life seems out of control.

I feel stuck and hopeless.

My needs are not being met.

Other people never seem to consider my feelings.

Section B

I tend to dominate conversations.

I'm usually right.

It's usually someone's else's fault if things go wrong.

I tend to explode or blow up during conversations because other people frustrate me.

I prefer to dominate others and be the "boss."

People owe me, and I let them know it.

People seem angry or resentful after talking to me.

Section C

I avoid confrontation at all costs.

It's difficult for me to admit that I'm angry.

I will act as if I'm happy even though I'm furious.

People tell me I'm too sarcastic.

I enjoy annoying other people when I'm angry with them.

I feel powerless when I deal with other people.

Section D

I clearly state my wants and needs in a respectful and appropriate way.

___ I use "I" statements and clearly express my feelings.

___ I listen without interrupting.

___ I maintain good eye contact most of the time.

___ I feel competent, in control, and connected to others.

___ I don't allow others to control or manipulate me.

___ I am responsible for getting my needs met in a respectful manner.

If you chose most of your answers in section A, you are a passive communicator. Section B, you tend to communicate aggressively. Section C, you are a passive-aggressive communicator. Section D, you tend to communicate assertively.

What is your primary communication style? _____

Reflections on This Exercise

What did you learn from this exercise?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What else can you do to make progress in this area?
