

Residence Life

Student Leadership

Development Series

Assertiveness

Passive Behavior: Avoids looking at people
Aggressive Behavior: Glares and stares at others
Assertive Behavior: Makes good eye contact

Passive Behavior: Shows little or no expression
Aggressive Behavior: Intimidates others with expressions
Assertive Behavior: Shows expressions that match the message

Passive Behavior: Slouches and withdraws
Aggressive Behavior: Stands rigidly, crosses arms, invades others' personal space
Assertive Behavior: Relaxes and adopts an open posture and expressions

Passive Behavior: Isolates self from groups
Aggressive Behavior: Controls groups
Assertive Behavior: Participates in groups

Passive Behavior: Agrees with others, despite feelings
Aggressive Behavior: Only considers own feelings, and/or demands of others
Assertive Behavior: Speaks to the point

Passive Behavior: Values self less than others
Aggressive Behavior: Values self more than others
Assertive Behavior: Values self equal to others

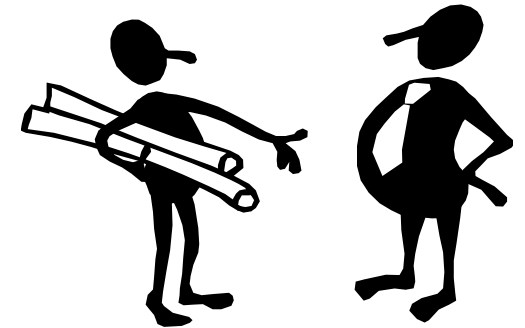
Passive Behavior: Hurts self to avoid hurting others
Aggressive Behavior: Hurts others to avoid being hurt
Assertive Behavior: Tries to hurt no one (including self)

Passive Behavior: Does not reach goals and may not know goals
Aggressive Behavior: Reaches goals but hurts others in the process
Assertive Behavior: Usually reaches goals without alienating others

Passive Behavior: You're okay, I'm not
Aggressive Behavior: I'm okay, you're not
Assertive Behavior: I'm okay, you're okay



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“The basic difference between being assertive and being aggressive is how our words and behavior affect the rights and well being of others.”
- Sharon Anthony Bower

BE ASSERTIVE!

Assertiveness is a skill that is developed with practice.

TO ASSERT – To state an opinion, claim a right, or establish authority. If you assert yourself, you behave in a way that expresses your confidence, importance or power and earns you respect from others. - *From the Oxford English Dictionary*

Assertiveness is standing up for your right to be treated fairly. It is expressing your opinions, needs, and feelings, without ignoring or hurting the opinions, needs, and feelings of others.

Because people want to be liked and thought of as 'nice' or 'easy to get along with', they often keep their opinions to themselves, especially if those opinions conflict with other people's. But this sometimes leads to being taken advantage of by people who are not as nice or considerate. Asserting yourself will stop others from cheating you and you from cheating yourself out of what you deserve.

Assertive behavior includes:

Starting, changing, or ending conversations

Sharing feelings, opinions, and experiences with others

Making requests and asking for favors



Refusing others' requests if they are too demanding

Questioning rules or traditions that don't make sense or don't seem fair

Addressing problems or things that bother you

Being firm so that your rights are respected

Expressing positive and negative emotions

Model:

"I...(describe feelings, reactions) when you...(describe behavior) because then I... (describe effect). I would rather you... (give alternative behavior)."

Tips for Behaving Less Aggressively

If you want to be assertive but are concerned that others may find you too aggressive (or others have told you that you are too aggressive), here are some recommendations for turning aggressive behavior into assertive behavior.

Give others a chance to speak.

It's important to express yourself, but if you're the only one speaking or you constantly control conversations, you may not be giving others the chance to express themselves.

Respect others' opinions.

You may disagree with other people's opinions (and some of them may be outrageous!), but everyone has a right to their opinion and the right to express it. If you disagree with someone, try to discuss your differences rationally.

Be diplomatic.

Expressing your opinion is important, but not always at the expense of others. If you know what you are going to say could be painful, yet you feel it still needs to be said, try:

Saying it in a kinder way (for example, "I disagree" instead of "You're wrong");

Cushioning your comment with a compliment (for example, "Amy has had some great ideas, but I just don't think this one will work" instead of "That's stupid"); or

Recognizing it's a difficult topic and handling it discreetly (for example, "You know, I really don't want to hurt your feelings, but I think you should know ... ")

Choose assertive (not aggressive) language.

Focus on specific behavior and facts instead of opinions (for example, "These documents weren't filed in order"

instead of "You're sloppy and disorganized")

Avoid exaggerations (for example, "You were late for the third time this week" instead of "You're never on time")

Focus on "I" not "You" language (for example, "I would like a chance to say something" instead of "You're always interrupting")

Avoid bullying and demanding behavior.

When making requests, avoid phrases that may make people feel bullied like "you must" or "you have to" and focus on language like "I think it would be better if ... " Also, think about what you are asking of others – are your requests reasonable, or are they unrealistic, unfair or selfish?

Avoid physically aggressive behavior.



Behavior such as glaring, shouting, slamming doors, throwing things, or invading others' personal space (for example by speaking 'in their face', pointing or jabbing them, or grabbing their arm) is physically aggressive. This behavior both scares and alienates people. No matter how angry or passionate you are about an issue, it is important to exercise physical control. Others won't respect you if your behavior indicates that you don't respect them.

Many people are concerned that if they assert themselves others will think of their behavior as aggressive. But there is a difference between being assertive and aggressive.

Assertive people state their opinions, while still being respectful of others. Aggressive people attack or ignore others' opinions in favor of their own. Passive people don't state their opinions at all.

Examples of the differences between passive, aggressive, and assertive behavior:

Passive Behavior: Is afraid to speak up

Aggressive Behavior: Interrupts and 'talks over' others

Assertive Behavior: Speaks openly

Passive Behavior: Speaks softly

Aggressive Behavior: Speaks loudly

Assertive Behavior: Uses a conversational tone