

## Assertive Communication Cheat Sheet

Assertive communication is the happy medium between aggressive and passive communication:

- **Aggressive communication** is controlling. It can feel to the other person like a demand or attack, and can evoke defensiveness, fear or resentment. Even if the other person responds by doing what you want, an aggressive tone might result in damage to the relationship.
- With **passive communication**, to avoid potential conflict, you do not express your own needs directly. Perhaps you are worried about damage to the relationship, so you either avoid the conversation or express yourself in a timid or indirect way. Over time, resentment can build.
- **Assertive communication** is the sweet spot in between, where you both express your needs directly *and* care for the relationship by being respectful. The goal is to resolve the issue at hand and increase understanding. It includes both sharing your perspective and being open to hearing the other person.

### Assertive Communication: Just Right

- The goal is to resolve the issue and increase understanding.
- Express your needs and preferences directly.
- Care for the relationship by being respectful.
- Communication focuses on your feelings, thoughts, and needs. Be open, honest, and vulnerable.
- Think of it as a polite expression or a request you are making, not a demand on the person.
- Communication is direct and clear.
- May include “I statements” (see below), making a request, setting limits, negotiation, and compromise.
- You listen to the other person and take responsibility for your own actions.

### “I statements”

- Focus is on expressing your feelings, perspectives, and needs, not on criticizing or blaming the other person. It gets your point across in a way that does not evoke argument or defensiveness - it is simply sharing your experience.
- Simply be honest and open. If you are making a request, state it directly and with respect.

\* An “I statement” might be something like this: “When you (describe specific behavior), I feel (state feeling) because (state need). I would prefer you to (state request).”

### Communication Tips:

- Keep your relationship values in mind. Even if you are angry or scared, aim to pause and act more consistently with your values.
- Show up authentically and openheartedly.

- Be specific. Stay on the specific issue or behavior at hand, instead of making a general statement. For instance: “Would you please put your dishes away?” instead of “You are such a slob!”
- Listen to the other person’s point of view.
- Validate the other person’s feelings.
- Let go of control. Remember: we really can’t control other people!
- Don’t get trapped by expectations or the need to be “right.”
- Reinforce positive behaviors from the other person.
- “Pick your battles.”
- If you mess up in an interaction, and aren’t your best self, do your best to repair the relationship. A simple I’m sorry goes a long way! Give yourself some compassion - this is very hard - and try again next time. “Practice makes progress!”