

Communication Styles Quiz

The following questions will help you get an idea of what your communication style is. Check off any for which your answer is yes. However, you'll probably be able to see that you do many of these things sometimes, so only check off those that seem to describe you best. The style for which you have most checks is your dominant communication style.

1. Passive

- ☐ Do you try to push your feelings away rather than express them to others?
- ☐ Do you fear that expressing yourself will cause others to be angry with you or not like you?
- ☐ Do you often say things like "I don't care" or "It doesn't matter to me" when you do care or it actually does matter?
- ☐ Do you keep quiet or try not to rock the boat because you don't want to upset others?
- ☐ Do you often go along with others' opinions because you don't want to be different?

Total: ____

2. Aggressive

- ☐ Are you most concerned with getting your own way, regardless of how it impacts others?
- ☐ Do you yell, swear, or use other aggressive means of communicating regularly?
- ☐ Do your friends fear you?
- ☐ Are you disrespectful toward others when communicating with them, not really caring if they get what they need as long as your needs are met?
- ☐ Do you have an attitude of "my way or the highway"? Have you ever heard anyone describe you this way?

Total: ____

3. Assertive

___ Do you believe that you have a right to express your opinions and emotions?

___ When you're having a disagreement with someone, are you able to express your opinions and emotions clearly and honestly?

___ When communicating with others, do you treat them with respect while also respecting yourself?

___ Do you listen closely to what others are saying, sending them the message that you're trying to understand their perspective?

___ Do you try to negotiate with others if you have different goals, rather than being focused on getting your own needs met?

Total: ___

*It is not uncommon for people to use different styles depending on the situation and person they're communicating with. The point is not to diagnose how you communicate, but to increase awareness of your patterns of communicating so you can choose to communicate in different ways if you choose.

Communication Styles

Passive Communication

Passive people often don't communicate verbally. They tend to bottle up their emotions instead of expressing them, perhaps out of fear of hurting others or making them uncomfortable, or maybe because they don't believe their feelings or opinions matter as much as those of others. People with a passive communication style usually fear confrontation and believe that voicing their opinions, beliefs, or emotions will cause conflict. Their goal is usually to keep the peace and not rock the boat, so they sit back and say little.

Aggressive Communication

Aggressive communicators attempt to control others. They're concerned with getting their own way, regardless of the cost to others. Aggressive people are direct, but in a forceful, demanding, and perhaps even vicious way. They tend to leave others feeling resentful, hurt and afraid. They might get what they want, but it's usually at the expense of others, and sometimes at their own expense, as they may later feel guilty, regretful, or ashamed because of how they behaved.

Assertive Communication

Assertive people express their wishes, thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in a direct and honest way that's respectful both of themselves and of others. They attempt to get their own needs met but also try to meet the needs of others as much as possible. They listen and negotiate, so others often choose to cooperate with them because they're also getting something out of the interaction. Others tend to respect and value assertive communicators because this communication style makes them feel respected and valued.

Assertive communication is the way people with good self-esteem tend to express themselves. They feel good about themselves, and they recognize that they have a right to express their opinions and feelings. However, this does not mean people with low self-esteem can't be assertive and being more assertive in your communication will actually improve how you feel about yourself. It will also improve your relationships and interactions with others, and this too will increase your self-esteem.

The Skill of Assertiveness

As with any new behaviour, becoming more assertive will take time and effort. Like any skill, it takes practice. Some people, especially those who have been more passive, find that communicating and acting assertively feels like acting aggressively, simply because you're not used to asking for what you want. Learning to be assertive will be uncomfortable and possibly even scary at times, but gradually you'll learn that this is the healthiest way of communicating and begin to see positive changes in your relationship.

The messages we received about emotions as we were growing up shaped our thoughts and feelings about them. The same thing happens with communication: we learn how to communicate by observing how others around us communicate. It can be challenging to be assertive if you grew up surrounded by people who communicated in passive, aggressive, or passive-aggressive ways.

Guidelines for Assertive Communication

1. Decide on your priorities.
2. Ask for what you want in a way that doesn't damage the relationship.
3. Negotiate.
4. Obtain information.
5. Say no in a way that doesn't damage the relationship.
6. Act according to your values and morals.

How Assertiveness is like Getting the Oil Changed

People often have difficulties asserting themselves with those they really care about, possibly because they fear they might damage the relationship by expressing their true needs and emotions. But relationships usually suffer because of a lack of assertiveness by one or both of the people in the relationship. Work on addressing problems as they arise in a relationship rather than letting them pile up until they come unmanageable.

Many people avoid speaking up when they're unhappy in a relationship because they're afraid of consequences, for example, the other person might get angry or end the relationship altogether. The worst thing that might happen is that the relationship ends, and if you don't discuss the problems and your feelings, chances are the relationship will end anyways as resent builds.

The Role of Assertiveness in Balancing Enjoyable Activities and Responsibilities

Another important part of taking care of relationships is developing more balance. It's important to think about what your patterns are: do you have a tendency to always give in and do what your partner, friends, or family members want you to do? Do you usually disregard others wishes and pursue your own interest? Or are you able to find more of a balance, sometimes putting your own needs first and other times putting the needs of others first? To live balanced lives, we all need to give, share, and sometimes make sacrifices in relationships, but we must also sometimes put our own needs first or even ask others to make sacrifices for us. Always giving in to other person's wishes won't be healthy for the relationship.

If you feel guilty about putting your own needs first at times, remember, putting your needs first isn't contrary to your morals and values as long as you aren't doing this consistently or at the expense of others. Rather, putting your own needs first is actually good self-care and will benefit their relationships as their needs are met. Think of assertiveness as a new language: unless you have opportunities to speak this new language, you're going to lose it fast.