

Information Sheet

Communication Styles

Communication style has a big impact on our ability to get along with others and achieve things that matter to us. Good communication skills can help us avoid conflict, solve problems and develop/maintain healthy relationships. The two basic elements of communication are **Verbal** (e.g., what is actually said) and **Nonverbal** (e.g., eye contact, posture, facial expression, voice tone and volume, gestures).

There are Four Common Communication Styles:

1. Passive: hard to stand up for oneself; aim to please others to avoid conflict. Features include:

Verbal Behaviour: overly apologetic, self-deprecating, needs not stated clearly.

Nonverbal Behaviour: lowered head, limited eye contact, hunched posture, a quiet, mumbling voice.

Speaker's Experience: needs and requests are often downplayed or ignored by others, often feels resentment when needs or requests are not met.

Listener's Experience: may be unclear of speaker's needs, may experience irritation due to speaker's excessive apologies, may pursue own interests without taking account of speaker's viewpoint.

2. Aggressive: frequently disregards needs and rights of others, may achieve desired result in short term; however relationships are often damaged. Features include:

Verbal Behaviour: demanding, blaming, accusatory, demeaning, uses provoking comments.

Nonverbal Behaviour: excessive eye contact, leaning over other person, standing very close, loud voice, sarcastic or angry tone, angry facial expression.

Speaker's Experience: may experience a sense of power or angry, jealous feelings.

Listener's Experience: may feel intimidated, angry, may comply with demands out of fear or irritation but lose respect for speaker and avoid future contact.

3. Passive Aggressive: communicate in an indirect and confusing manner by verbally agreeing to requests and indirectly expressing hostility by procrastination, sullenness or deliberate/repeated failure to accomplish

requested tasks. Features include:

Verbal Behaviour: usually appears quite agreeable and wanting to please (although this is misleading).

Nonverbal Behaviour: may be similar to passive or assertive styles of communicating.

Speaker's Experience: feels angry and frustrated yet unable to express true feelings through desire to please others or avoid disapproval.

Listener's Experience: confused as to why the speaker's behaviour does not match what they have said.

4. Assertive: able to stand up for oneself in a manner that is respectful to self and others, seek help when needed, feel comfortable saying 'No' when appropriate and express thoughts and feelings when it is safe to do so. Features include:

Verbal Behaviour: respectfully states the issue or request, accepts responsibility for own feelings (rather than blaming) with 'I' statements, e.g., 'I need some help', 'I'm angry with you.'

Nonverbal Behaviour: moderate eye contact, upright posture/confident body language, a clear pleasant voice, appropriate speech volume.

Speaker's Experience: feels calm and confident, facilitates development and maintenance of healthy, respectful relationships.

Listener's Experience: feels respected, likely to re-engage with the speaker in future, less likely to react in a defensive manner to requests.

Which Style Do You Use?

People generally feel most comfortable using one style of communication; however, these may change depending on the situation or people involved. Using an assertive communication style is optimal and maximises the likelihood of the speaker's meaning being clearly understood and responded to in an appropriate and/or favourable manner.

Please refer to *Approach Info* sheets on Assertive Communication and Effective Listening for further tips on communicating clearly and effectively.