

Exercise 34 - Submissive, Assertive & Aggressive Communication

Use this exercise to distinguish between the three Behavioural styles and practise assertively communicating your needs. This approach can be used at home, at work and in personal relationships:



Submissive Communication – You Win – I Lose

During submissive communication, we prioritise the needs and feelings of others at our own personal cost. We do not effectively express our own needs and default to self-sacrifice, avoidance, submissive agreement or people pleasing. This can lead to being taken for granted, inequality in relationships, being treated unfairly and exploitation by others.

Aggressive Communication – You Lose – I Win

During aggressive communication we prioritise our own needs, preferences and feelings over the needs of other people. This can be perceived as selfish, arrogant or self-centred. Other people can feel ignored, criticised or bullied. Aggressive communication ultimately leads to inequality in relationships and a sense of alienation.

Assertive Communication – I Win – You Win

During assertive communication the needs, wishes and feelings of both sides are considered in a balanced and respectful manner. This involves clearly presenting what we need and listening carefully to the needs of others. Assertive communication involves taking the initiative to strike the deal; achieving what we want by giving something in return. It involves clarity of purpose, confidence and a willingness to flexibly compromise.

Practice Exercises

Identify the submissive, aggressive and assertive responses for each of the following scenarios:

Situation	Your boss asks you to take on additional work even though you are already stretched.
Submissive	
Aggressive	
Assertive	

Situation	Your partner or housemate leaves a mess in the kitchen again without offering to help clean up.
Submissive	
Aggressive	
Assertive	

Situation	You are served cold or poor standard food at a busy restaurant.
Submissive	
Aggressive	
Assertive	

Situation	Your friend asks to borrow money when you have your own financial constraints or goals.
Submissive	
Aggressive	
Assertive	

Situation	Your partner / friend continuously makes decisions without consulting you first.
Submissive	
Aggressive	
Assertive	

Situation	A shop assistant refuses to replace your faulty toaster because the box has been opened
Submissive	
Aggressive	
Assertive	

Situation	A member of your social circle unfairly criticises a close friend when they are absent
Submissive	
Aggressive	
Assertive	