

# LEARNING TO BE ASSERTIVE

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## AGENDA

- Starter
- Passive? Aggressive? Assertive?
- Action Reaction
- Developing Assertive Behavior
- Conclusion
- Student Assessment

### Objectives

Students will define passive, aggressive, and assertive behavior.

Students will practice using assertive behavior and will learn to recognize passive and aggressive behavior.

Students will practice techniques to improve their assertiveness.

### Materials Needed

- Three dictionaries (Part I)
- Copies of the “Passive, Aggressive, and Assertive Behaviors: The Scenarios” activity sheet cut into sections (Circle one behavior type in each section. Each group should have one scenario.) (Part II)
- One copy of the “Developing Assertiveness Skills: Personal Characteristics” activity sheet for each student (Part III)
- One copy of the “Developing Assertiveness Skills: Action Plan” activity sheet for each student (Part III)

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**Starter (3 minutes)**

Tell students to take out a piece of paper and a pen. Tell them that they are to answer yes or no to the following questions:

- Does everyone have the right to earn respect and to retain dignity in all situations?
- Should people be able to say yes or no like they mean it?
- Should everyone be able to express opinions?
- Should people be able to ask for what they want?

Explain to students that the answer to all of these questions is yes; they have these rights, and so do other people. Tell students that this lesson will help them learn how to exercise these rights in a way that is respectful of others.

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**Part I Passive? Aggressive? Assertive? (10 minutes)**

Purpose: Students define passive, aggressive, and assertive behavior.

**1. Students discuss passive, aggressive, and assertive behavior.**

Before the session begins, create three columns on the board. Title each column “passive,” “aggressive,” or “assertive.”

Divide the class into three groups. Call students’ attention to the column headings and ask, “Have you ever heard the words on the board before?” Assign one word to each group. Explain that each group is responsible for brainstorming and writing a definition of its assigned word.

**2. Student groups define passive, aggressive, and assertive behavior.**

After the groups have written their definitions, distribute dictionaries to each group. Have each group find the dictionary definition of its assigned word and write it beneath its own definition.

Ask each group to present its definitions to the class. Ask students to comment on the differences between the group definitions and the dictionary definitions. Review the following with the class:

- Passive people seem to lack confidence and may seem ineffective.
- Aggressive people often seem to be offensive and have a strong need to dominate. Often, aggressive people seem to be annoying, pushy, or brash.
- Assertive people seem to be positive, confident, and fair when dealing with people.

Ask students to describe how an aggressive person and a passive person might act. Establish that aggressive behavior can include such behavior as using a hostile tone of voice, invading other people's personal space, and using inappropriate physical contact. Passive behavior can include using a low tone of voice, avoiding eye contact, and having a slouched posture.

Ask students to consider how they usually react when someone uses these behaviors around them or toward them. Students should respond that both passive behaviors and aggressive behaviors often lead to negative reactions.

### **3. Students create a class definition of assertive behavior.**

After each group has presented its work, develop a class definition of assertive behavior.

Elicit from students that assertive behavior encourages equality and healthy relationships among people. Assertive people stand up for their rights, express themselves honestly and courteously, and respect the rights of others.

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## **Part II Action Reaction (25 minutes)**

Purpose: Students practice using assertive behavior and learn to recognize passive and aggressive behavior.

### **1. Students role-play passive, aggressive, and assertive behavior.**

Have ready the "Passive, Aggressive, and Assertive Behaviors: The Scenarios" activity sheet, which should be cut into sections and filled out so that there is one scenario and one behavior for each group. Be sure to vary the behaviors so that each type is presented approximately the same number of times.

Divide the class into groups of three or four. Tell students the following:

- Each group will receive a scenario.
- Each group will role-play passive, aggressive, or assertive behaviors. One student will serve as a narrator, and the other two or three students will act out the situation.
- As the scenarios are presented, the other groups will identify what type of behavior was demonstrated.

Distribute the scenarios and allow students five minutes to prepare. Then, call on groups to present their scenarios.

### **2. Students analyze the role plays.**

After each scenario, ask, “Can you identify the kind of behavior just demonstrated? What leads you to that conclusion?”

Discuss the performers’ nonverbal and verbal communication, their use of statements that focus on what they think and feel, and whether they calmly asked questions and acted courteously.

### **3. Students evaluate the effectiveness of each type of behavior.**

When all of the scenarios have been performed, ask, “In the scenarios, which kind of behavior did you think was most effective? When did people seem best able to achieve their goals?”

Lead students to recognize that assertive behavior is usually the most effective, but allow observations that sometimes there might be situations in which aggressive or passive behavior is needed or acceptable (e.g., a parent may need to be aggressive when a child is in danger). Passive behavior may be appropriate when one person in a conflict situation is out of control.

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## **Part III Developing Assertive Behavior (15 minutes)**

Purpose: Students practice techniques to improve their assertiveness.

### **1. Students create a class mission statement regarding assertiveness.**

Explain to students that a mission statement describes a philosophy and a course of action to reach a goal. The class will now create a mission statement that will guide them toward the goal of assertive behavior.

Elicit from the class a philosophy on assertive behavior. If necessary, offer students this prompt: “We believe that assertive behavior is essential to achieving success.”

You may wish to suggest that students add statements such as the following: “As assertive people, we are confident. We express our needs and opinions comfortably. We are sensitive to the feelings and needs of others. We have the right to be listened to and taken seriously, and we recognize that right for others.”

### **2. Students list their strengths and weaknesses.**

Tell students that they will need to practice assertive behavior. Distribute the “Developing Assertiveness Skills: Personal Characteristics” activity sheet.

Ask students to recall the earlier discussion about the characteristics that passive, aggressive, and assertive people display. Then, ask students to consider their own behavior patterns. Have students list on the activity sheet the strengths and weaknesses they possess that relate to assertive behavior. Remind students to think of their behavior in light of the class discussion and role plays.

### **3. Students identify a weakness to improve.**

Ask students to select one of the weaknesses they've written on the activity sheet that they would like to improve (e.g., lack of initiative, shyness).

Explain that being assertive requires self-confidence. Remind students that confidence is built largely through their efforts to focus on their strengths. Explain that the more they build their confidence by continuing to identify and improve upon their weaknesses, the easier it will be for them to assert themselves.

#### **4. Students develop an action plan to improve their assertiveness.**

Distribute a copy of the "Developing Assertiveness Skills: Action Plan" activity sheet to each student.

Have students complete the action plan. Review the steps of an action plan that were taught in lesson 1:

- Determine your long-term goal.
- Establish stepping-stone goals.
- Set deadlines for completing each goal.
- Complete each step on time.
- Continue until you attain your goal.

Tell students that they will evaluate and record their progress daily, so they should write the action plan in a format that is easy to read and consider.

Give students time in class for a week or two to develop the habit of evaluating their action plans and progress. Explain that as they develop self-confidence, they should continue to practice assertive behavior. Tell them to be more open, to express their ideas, and to show acceptance of others. Encourage students to act in a confident way. Remind them that being assertive becomes easier the more they practice such behavior. Explain that people will respect them more when they act assertively.

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### **Conclusion (2 minutes)**

Ask students to name the characteristics of assertive behavior. Elicit from students the following **key points** that were taught in this lesson:

- Assertive people are positive, confident, and fair in dealing with others.
- Be assertive by using statements that show you are responsible, by remaining calm and asking questions, and by respecting others.
- Assertive behavior is usually the most effective way to achieve goals.
- Practice assertive behavior, and you will become more self-confident and respected.

## Student Assessment

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1. Create three scenarios—one that illustrates passive behavior, one that illustrates aggressive behavior, and one that illustrates assertive behavior.
2. List the advantages and disadvantages of passive, aggressive, and assertive behavior.
3. List three things you can do to become more assertive.

## LESSON EXTENSIONS

### Using Quotations

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“Manners are a sensitive awareness of the feelings of others.” –Emily Post

Have students brainstorm rules of etiquette and compare their rules to an actual etiquette book. Discuss rules that still seem important and others that seem outdated. Discuss how manners and respect are important to assertive behavior.

### Addressing Multiple Learning Styles

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Have students write, using carefully selected words, a 10-second speech about an issue that concerns them. Students should try to assertively and clearly make their points within this time limit.

Have students share their speeches. Invite other students to judge the speeches.

### Writing in Your Journal

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Have students imagine the complaints they’d hear if inanimate objects could talk. For example, have them imagine a pencil complaining, “Oh, stop biting my eraser!”

Have students write their own imaginary conversations between two assertive inanimate objects.

### Using Technology

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Have students visit [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) and view a presidential debate. Tell them to note the manner in which the candidates make their points.

As a class, discuss how each candidate demonstrates assertive behavior during the debate.



## Homework

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Have students choose a news story, event, or idea that is likely to have opposing points of view.

Have students write a short essay in favor of the issue and then write another short essay against it.

Have them make sure that they assertively back up both points of view with facts, quotes, and substance.

## Additional Resources

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Have students read selections from *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth* by Mahatma Gandhi.

Have students research Gandhi's life. Have them report their findings to the class and identify how Gandhi exhibited assertive behavior.

# PASSIVE, AGGRESSIVE, AND ASSERTIVE BEHAVIORS: THE SCENARIOS

**Instructions to the teacher: Reproduce this activity sheet as needed. Circle one of the behaviors listed beneath each scenario; vary the behaviors you circle so that each one is equally represented. Cut out each scenario and its list of behaviors. Distribute one to each group.**

You borrowed your cousin's favorite shirt and accidentally spilled something on it. You've apologized, and your cousin has forgiven you. Now, you want to borrow your cousin's new shoes, which will look great with what you're wearing tonight. What will you do?

Portray the behavior circled below:

**AGGRESSIVE   PASSIVE   ASSERTIVE**

You find out that someone you thought was a friend has been spreading rumors about you. You see the friend walking down the street toward you. What do you do?

Portray the behavior circled below:

**AGGRESSIVE   PASSIVE   ASSERTIVE**

Your best friend needs to pass math. You are in the same class. Tomorrow is a very important test, and your friend has not studied. She wants to cheat off of you. What do you do?

Portray the behavior circled below:

**AGGRESSIVE   PASSIVE   ASSERTIVE**

You work at a pet shop after school and on Saturdays. Your boss has noticed that money has been missing from the cash register. He has accused you. Tell him that you are not the person who has been taking money.

Portray the behavior circled below:

**AGGRESSIVE   PASSIVE   ASSERTIVE**

# PASSIVE, AGGRESSIVE, AND ASSERTIVE BEHAVIORS: THE SCENARIOS

(CONTINUED)

Your parents have established a curfew for you on weekends. As a high school student, you feel that the time they have set is unreasonable. Ask them to change the curfew.

Portray the behavior circled below:

**AGGRESSIVE** **PASSIVE** **ASSERTIVE**

A student with a reputation for being irrational and violent has taken your backpack. You ask him to return it.

Portray the behavior circled below:

**AGGRESSIVE** **PASSIVE** **ASSERTIVE**

Your neighbor's dog is in your yard or in front of your door almost every day making a mess and barking. Tell your neighbor to control her dog.

Portray the behavior circled below:

**AGGRESSIVE** **PASSIVE** **ASSERTIVE**

You have loaned money to a close friend. It has been over three weeks, and he still has not paid you back. You need the money to go out this weekend. Ask for the money.

Portray the behavior circled below:

**AGGRESSIVE** **PASSIVE** **ASSERTIVE**

# DEVELOPING ASSERTIVENESS SKILLS

## PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES

# DEVELOPING ASSERTIVENESS SKILLS

## ACTION PLAN

Goals: \_\_\_\_\_

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Personal Action Plan to Achieve Goal: \_\_\_\_\_

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Time Frame for Action Plan: \_\_\_\_\_

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