

Four Styles of Behaviour

In their book “Assertiveness at Work”, Ken Back and Kate Back describe assertive behaviour as: *“Standing up for your own rights in a way that does not violate other people’s rights” and “Expressing your needs, wants, opinions, feelings and beliefs in direct, honest and appropriate ways.”*

Assertive behaviour is an effective form of communication. It contrasts with passive behaviour in which you do not communicate your own needs, or do not consider them as important as other people’s, and with aggressive behaviour, in which you seek to get your own needs met, without due consideration for others. A fourth type of behaviour, passive-aggressive, is a covert form of aggression, which does not reflect open and honest communication. More information on these four types of behaviour is covered in the table on the next page.

Assertiveness is expressed both verbally, through the words you use, and non-verbally. By ensuring that your words and body language are congruent, a stronger and clearer message will be communicated.

Verbal

- Appropriate use of “I” statements to own your thoughts and feelings
- Making clear, unambiguous and concise points
- Use of questions for clarification, and to find out the thoughts and feelings of others
- Being objective when giving feedback

Non-Verbal

- Steady, clear tone of voice
- Open expression, appropriate facial responses when listening
- Use of eye contact - firm but not “staring”
- Relaxed physicality, appears at ease

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	ASSERTIVE	PASSIVE	AGGRESSIVE	PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE
Point of view	I will stand up for my personal rights and say what I think and feel without violating the rights of others	I will not express my thoughts and feelings at all, or with such diffidence that they can easily be ignored	I will stand up for my rights at the expense of others	I will express my thoughts and feelings in such a way that others will not realise I am competing with them
Basic message	I respect you and expect you to respect me. This is what I think, this is what I feel, and this is how I see the situation	I don't count. You can take advantage of me. I don't matter as much as you	This is what I think. If you think differently from me you are stupid. What I want is more important than what you want	I won't tell you exactly what I think and feel, but I expect you to guess what is in my mind and to behave as if I am more important than you
Crisis behaviour	Evaluates situation and takes action	Flees or gives in	Rebels or attacks	Rebels or attacks covertly. Finds someone to blame
Goal	Communication; to understand and to be understood; to give and receive fair play; to negotiate	To appease others and to avoid conflict	To win; if necessary by humiliating or overpowering others so that they are less able to stand up for themselves	To win and to be seen as non-competitive

Further Reading

Assertiveness at Work, Ken Back and Kate Back

A Woman in Your Own Right: Assertiveness and You, Anne Dickson and Kate Charlesworth