Four communication styles

Passive, aggressive, passive-aggressive and assertive.

We all use every style at times. Most of us lean on one or two, especially under stress. Only one of them respects both people.

	Passive	Aggressive	Passive-aggressive	Assertive
The message	"You matter. I do not."	"I matter. You do not."	"I will not say it, but you will know about it."	"We both matter."
Sounds like	"I do not mind." "Whatever you want." "Sorry."	"You always..." "That is ridiculous."	"Fine." Sarcasm, sulking, "forgetting".	"I would like..." "I feel..." "No, I cannot."
Looks like	Quiet voice, little eye contact, hunched	Loud, staring, pointing, in your space	Sighs, eye-rolling, the silent treatment	Steady voice, relaxed, open, direct
Short term	Avoids conflict	Gets its way	Avoids direct conflict	May feel uncomfortable
Long term	Resentment, being overlooked, low self-worth	Fear and distance in others, guilt	Mistrust, confusion, problems unsolved	Respect, clearer relationships, more needs met

Why we end up passive or aggressive

- We were taught that our needs come last, or that being nice means agreeing.
- We fear conflict, rejection or being disliked.
- We hold it in for so long that it finally bursts out.
- Nobody ever showed us another way.

Assertiveness is a skill

It is not a personality type, and it can be learned. It means saying what you think, feel and need, clearly and respectfully, while accepting that the other person may say no.

The style I use most, and with whom

A situation where I would like to be more assertive

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Saying it with "I"

A structure for raising something without starting a row.

Name _____ Date _____

Sentences that start with "You" tend to sound like accusations, and the other person gets ready to defend. Sentences that start with "I" describe your own experience, which is much harder to argue with.

When...
Describe what happened, plainly. No "always" or "never".

→

I feel...
Name the feeling. One word if you can.

→

Because...
The effect on you, or what you need.

→

I would like...
A clear, specific request.

Instead of	Try
"You never listen to me."	"When I am talking and you are on your phone, I feel unimportant. I would like us to put phones down at dinner."
"You are so selfish."	"When plans are made without me, I feel left out. I would like to be asked first."
"You always leave everything to me."	"When I do the tidying alone, I feel worn out and resentful. Could we split it?"

Watch out for

- "I feel that you..." is a "you" statement in disguise.
- Keep to one issue.
- Choose a calm moment.

Try it

What I want to say, the way it first comes out

When...	I feel...	Because...	I would like...

How it went when I said it

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Saying no

How to say no briefly and clearly, with words you can use.

Each time you say yes, you give up something else: time, rest, your own priorities. Saying no is not selfish. It protects the things you have already said yes to.

How to do it

1. **Keep it short.** "No, I cannot do that." Long explanations invite debate.
2. **Be clear.** "I will have to pass" is clearer than "I am not sure, maybe".
3. **Be kind, not sorry.** One "I am afraid not" is enough. You do not need to apologise for having limits.
4. **Buy time if you need it.** "Let me check and come back to you."
5. **Repeat if pushed.** Same words, same tone. You do not need a better reason.

Words you can use

> *"Thanks for asking. I cannot this time."*
>
> *"That does not work for me."*
>
> *"I am not able to take that on at the moment."*
>
> *"I cannot do Saturday. I could do an hour on Sunday."*
>
> *"I understand it is important to you. The answer is still no."*

What gets in the way

- [ ] Fear they will be upset or think less of me
- [ ] Guilt
- [ ] Feeling responsible for their problem
- [ ] Wanting to be seen as helpful
- [ ] Not wanting to miss out
- [ ] Believing my needs matter less

Practice, from easier to harder

A request I could say no to	How hard (0 to 10)	What I will say

The discomfort after saying no is usually brief. Resentment after saying yes can last much longer.

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Asking for what I need

Plan a clear, direct request.

Name _____ Date _____

Many of us hint, hope or wait for others to notice. Then we feel hurt when they do not. A clear, direct request is kinder to both of you.

What do I need? Be specific.

Who am I asking?

What has stopped me from asking before?

A good request is

- [ ] Specific ("Could you collect the kids on Thursdays?" not "I need more help")
- [ ] About what I want, not what I do not want
- [ ] Something they can actually do
- [ ] A request, not a demand: they can say no
- [ ] Made at a reasonable time

The words I will use

When and where I will ask

If they say yes

If they say no

Can I ask someone else? Meet the need another way? Negotiate?

How it went

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Understanding boundaries

What boundaries are, the main kinds and how to state one.

A boundary is a limit you set to look after yourself: what you are willing to do, give, accept and share. A boundary is not meant to shut people out or to punish them. Clear limits make it easier to be close to people.

Kinds of boundaries

Time and energy
How much you give to work, family, friends, favours.

Emotional
How much of other people's feelings and problems you take on. What you share about yourself.

Physical
Personal space, touch, privacy.

Material and digital
Money, belongings, your home. When you are reachable, and what gets shared online.

Too loose

- Saying yes when I mean no
- Taking responsibility for others' feelings
- Oversharing, or letting others overshare
- Feeling drained and resentful
- Being taken for granted

Too rigid

- Keeping everyone at a distance
- Never asking for help
- Not sharing anything personal
- Cutting people off quickly
- Feeling lonely and unknown

Healthy boundaries

- Are clear and stated calmly.
- Are about what you will do, not about controlling the other person.
- Can flex with the person and the situation.
- Are followed through.

How to word it

"If (this happens), I will (do this)."

> *"If the shouting starts, I will leave the room and we can talk when things are calmer."*

Expect some pushback
People who benefited from your lack of boundaries may not like the new ones. Their discomfort does not mean you are doing something wrong.

Where in my life is a boundary most needed?

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Setting a boundary

Plan one boundary: the wording, how they may react and how you will stick to it.

Name _____ Date _____

The situation. What keeps happening that is not OK for me?

How it affects me

What I need instead

My boundary, in one or two sentences. ("I am not willing to..." "From now on I will..." "If... then I will...")

How they might react

How I will respond

Stay calm. Repeat it. No need to justify, argue or over-explain.

What I will do if the boundary is not respected

What might tempt me to back down, and what I will remind myself

After I said it: what happened, and how do I feel?

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My rights

A list of basic rights that apply to you and to everyone else.

These apply to you, and to everyone you deal with. Tick the ones you already live by. Circle the ones you find hard to believe.

- [ ] I have the right to be treated with respect.
- [ ] I have the right to say no without feeling guilty.
- [ ] I have the right to have feelings and to express them.
- [ ] I have the right to have needs, and for them to matter as much as other people's.
- [ ] I have the right to ask for what I want, knowing the answer may be no.
- [ ] I have the right to change my mind.
- [ ] I have the right to make mistakes.
- [ ] I have the right to say "I do not know" or "I do not understand".
- [ ] I have the right to take time to think before I answer.
- [ ] I have the right to my own opinions and values.
- [ ] I have the right not to be responsible for other adults' feelings or problems.
- [ ] I have the right to privacy and time to myself.
- [ ] I have the right to be listened to and taken seriously.
- [ ] I have the right to end a conversation in which I am being disrespected.
- [ ] I have the right to choose not to assert myself.

The rights I find hardest to believe apply to me

Where did I learn that they did not?

How would I act this week if I fully believed one of them?

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Planning a difficult conversation

Ten minutes of planning makes a hard conversation much more likely to go well.

Name _____ Date _____

Who do I need to talk to, and about what?

What do I want to come out of it? (One realistic thing.)

How do I want to behave, whatever they do?

How I see it

How they might see it

My opening line. Calm, specific, no blame.

The two or three points I most need to make

What I am willing to give, and what I am not

What might throw me

- [ ] Tears
- [ ] Anger
- [ ] Silence
- [ ] Blame

How I will stay steady

- [ ] Breathe out
- [ ] Slow down
- [ ] Ask for a pause

When and where

Afterwards: what went well, and what is the next step?

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