



Royal Flying  
Doctor Service

QUEENSLAND SECTION

# A GUIDE TO Healthy communication

FROM THE FLYING DOCTOR

Communication is fundamental to maintaining positive personal and professional relationships. Due to different communication styles, personalities and perspectives, healthy communication can sometimes be hard to achieve. Identifying your own communication style is helpful when exploring alternative ways of interacting with others.

## PASSIVE, AGGRESSIVE, AND ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION

Passive, aggressive, and assertive communication refers to three styles of interaction. Everyone has the capability to use all three styles, and everyone uses them all at least occasionally. For example, someone might act passively with their boss, and assertively with their partner.

**Aggressive communication** is expressed in a forceful and hostile manner, and usually involves alienating messages such as 'you-statements' (blaming the other person and accusing them of being wrong or at fault) and labelling. The person's tone of voice and facial expressions are usually unfriendly. The assumption behind aggressive communication is 'your needs don't matter' (I win/you lose).

**Passive communication** involves putting your needs last and not expressing your thoughts or feelings or being able to ask for what you want. When using passive communication, it may feel like others are walking all over you because you don't assert your own needs. This may result in feelings being bottled up and eventually resentment may occur. The assumption behind passive communication is 'my needs don't matter' (you win/I lose – and I resent you for that).

**Assertive communication** involves clearly expressing what you think, how you feel and what you want, without demanding that you must have things your way. The basic underlying assumption is 'we both matter – let's try to work this out'. Assertive communication increases your likelihood of getting what you want, avoiding conflict and maintaining good relationships (I win/you win). When being assertive you can: express your own thoughts, feelings and needs, make reasonable requests of other people, stand up for your own rights and say 'no' to requests from others at times, without feeling guilty.



Identifying your own communication style is helpful when exploring alternative ways of interacting with others.



## HONEST COMMUNICATION

Starting to use assertive communication can be a challenge if you have not done so previously.

Finding a safe place to practice with someone you trust can be an effective stepping stone towards using this style in real scenarios. The following approach is a useful example of honest assertive communication.

### THE DESC APPROACH:

- D** DESCRIBE THE BEHAVIOUR THAT IS CONCERNING YOU OBJECTIVELY
- E** EXPRESS HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT IT
- S** SPECIFY THE BEHAVIOUR YOU WANT
- C** STATE THE CONSEQUENCES

## HELPFUL HINTS

- > Timing is important – say what you want to say when it is an issue but consider whether the other person is best able to receive the information.
- > Always start with a positive comment if you can. Most people immediately go on the defensive (and stop listening) if you start on a negative or critical note.
- > Be mindful of what you are saying.
- > Describe behaviour in neutral terms – avoid emotionally loaded words like ‘appalling’ or ‘disgraceful’.
- > Feelings should be expressed as ‘I’, not ‘you’.
- > Specify what changes you want rather than negatives or criticisms (avoid statements like “I wish you’d be more considerate”).
- > Consequences can be negative or positive, be positive wherever possible. Negative consequences are often threats.
- > Avoid statements that are impossible or unenforceable.

Finding a safe place to practice with someone you trust can be an effective stepping stone towards using this style in real scenarios.

Sources: [www.reachout.org.au](http://www.reachout.org.au)  
[www.therapistaid.com](http://www.therapistaid.com)  
[www.blackdoginstitute.org.au](http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au)

