



COMMUNICATION STYLES

Learn three common communication styles through skits

OBJECTIVES

- Students will explore possible communication styles (passive, assertive, aggressive)
- Students will consider which style is most effective

MATERIALS

Communication Style Skits

- Passive, Assertive, Aggressive

Communication Style Articles

- Communication Styles option 1
- Communication Styles option 2

TIME

45 min

LESSON INTRO

The three communication styles presented (Passive, Assertive, and Aggressive) are taught here in the context of addressing conflictual situations.

INTRODUCING COMMUNICATION STEP BY STEP

1. Hand out or display one of the articles on Communication Styles. Choose whichever one you wish!
2. Ask students to annotate the article as they read. Consider:
 - Circle information that is important
 - Underline information that they already know
 - Star information that they have a question, wonder, or alternative idea.
3. Allow time for students to read and digest the material.
4. Group up students into pods of four to share their information from the article.
5. Next, split the class into three small groups and assign each group one of the three communication styles: Passive, Assertive, Aggressive.

6. Hand out the skits for students to practice reading through and run through a rehearsal.
7. As the groups are ready, invite them up to perform. Students should not initially share which “style” they are presenting.
8. As students perform the skit, have the rest of the class figure out which style is being represented by how the conflict plays out.

VARIATIONS

1. Instead of using the pre-made skits. Instruct each group to write a short skit in a way that characterizes their assigned style. Use the sample synopsis’ below for a “scene” that the students can base their skit from.

All of the skits should be based on the same scenario so that students can see a comparison between different ways to handle a situation:

- **Tattoo Parlor:** Customer comes into a tattoo parlor and describes the tattoo he/she wants. The tattoo artist proceeds to give the customer a hideous tattoo that is nothing like the one described. Customer communicates his/her displeasure with a _____ style.
- **Car Mechanic:** Customer brings car into the mechanic to have a specific issue repaired. When the customer comes back to pick up the car, the mechanic has done entirely the wrong work. Customer communicates his/her displeasure with a _____ style.
- **Mom’s Night Out:** Mom is heading out for the evening, and asks the kids to complete three specific tasks while she’s out. The kids play and watch TV instead. When she comes home, she communicates her displeasure with a _____ style.

As students perform the skit, have the rest of the class figure out which style is being represented by how the conflict plays out.

REFLECTION & WRAP UP

1. Once all the groups have performed, have students circle up to discuss:
 - What was the most effective style of response in this scenario?
 - What specific behaviors (traits) made that style most effective?
 - Is there a ‘right way’ to address conflict?
 - When do you usually interact in any of these ways?
 - Why can it be difficult to be assertive?
 - Think of a specific time when you used a passive or aggressive style. What made that way seem like the best option?

NOTES

Educational Standards: CASEL: Self Awareness, CASEL: Self Management, CASEL: Social Awareness, CASEL: Relationship Skills, CASEL: Responsible Decision-Making, P21: Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, P21: Communication and Collaboration, P21: Flexibility and Adaptability, P21: Social and Cross-Cultural Skills, CCRS:SL3 Evaluate Perspective and Evidence, CCRS:SL4 Present Information, CCRS:SL6 Adapt Speech

**Skit #1 - At a Car Mechanics**

Customer: Hi! I think my car is broken and I need it fixed.

Mechanic: Ok! I'll take a look at it and let you know what I find out tomorrow.

NEXT DAY

Customer: Hi! I'm back!

Mechanic: Well, I tried fixing the engine but while I was tinkering around...um...I popped the tires and scratched the hood of the car.

Customer: WHAT?!?! (Very angry) You..You..You'll regret this!!!

(Pushes something off the table)

Just you wait!!!

You're the absolute most ugly, terrible, #!%@* good for nothing person I ever saw!

Mechanic: (Angry) Hold on!! You have no right to call me that! And watch out for my property!!

Customer: YOUR property?!?!? What about MY property?!?!? I'll be back and you'll be sorry!

(Storms out)



Skit #2 - At a Car Mechanics

Customer: Hi! I think my car is broken and I need it fixed.

Mechanic: Ok! I'll take a look at it and let you know what I find out tomorrow.

NEXT DAY

Customer: Hi! I'm back!

Mechanic: Well, I tried fixing the engine but while I was tinkering around...um...I popped the tires and scratched the hood of the car.

Customer: Oh.... (Looks worried)

Mechanic: Yeah, sometimes that happens, you know.

Customer: (Quietly) I've never heard of that before.

Mechanic: Well, I can fix the tires for \$300.

Customer: Ok... (looks down, sighs). Well... I guess so. I need my car fixed.

**Skit #3 - At a Car Mechanics**

Customer: Hi! I think my car is broken and I need it fixed.

Mechanic: Ok! I'll take a look at it and let you know what I find out tomorrow.

NEXT DAY

Customer: Hi! I'm back!

Mechanic: Well, I tried fixing the engine but while I was tinkering around...um...I popped the tires and scratched the hood of the car.

Customer: (Calmly) Well, that is a problem. What are you going to do about it?

Mechanic: I don't know...keep working on it I guess.

Customer: I'd rather take my business to someone I can trust.

Mechanic: Well, I can fix the tires for \$300.

Customer: No, you've already caused me a bigger problem. I'd like you to pay for the damage that you caused.

Mechanic: Wait! It was an accident!

Customer: I understand you didn't mean to, but you still ruined my car. And now I feel like you are trying to cheat me into more business! I have the number of the Business Bureau who I will call as soon as we're done here, they will look into your business. Meanwhile, let's take a look at the car. I've got another mechanic I will bring in to assess the damage and charge the bill.

Communication Styles

Passive

Assertive

Aggressive



General

Compliant, submissive, talks little, vague non-committal communication, puts self down, praises others

"I don't mind...that's fine....yes alright"

Actions and expressions fit with words spoken, firm but polite and clear messages, respectful of self and others

"That's a good idea, and how about if we did this too..." or "I can see that, but I'd really like..."

Sarcastic, harsh, always right, superior, know it all, interrupts, talks over others, critical, put-downs, patronising, disrespectful of others

"This is what we're doing, if you don't like it, tough"

Beliefs

You're okay, I'm not

Has no opinion other than that the other person/s are always more important, so it doesn't matter what they think anyway

I'm okay, you're okay

Believes or acts as if all the individuals involved are equal, each deserving of respect, and no more entitled than the other to have things done their way

I'm okay, you're not

Believe they are entitled to have things done their way, the way they want it to be done, because they are right, and others (and their needs) are less important

Eyes

Avoids eye contact, looks down, teary, pleading

Warm, welcoming, friendly, comfortable eye contact

Narrow, emotion-less, staring, expressionless

Posture

Makes body smaller – stooped, leaning, hunched shoulders

Relaxed, open, welcoming

Makes body bigger – upright, head high, shoulders out, hands on hips, feet apart

Hands

Together, fidgety, clammy

Open, friendly and appropriate gestures

Pointing fingers, making fists, clenched, hands on hips

Consequences

Give in to others, don't get what we want or need, self-critical thoughts, miserable

Good relationships with others, happy with outcome and to compromise

Make enemies, upset others and self, feel angry and resentful



Definitions of Passive, Aggressive, and Assertive Responses

Passive Behavior involves saying nothing in a response, keeping feelings to yourself, hiding feelings from others, and perhaps even hiding your feelings from yourself. Passive behavior is often dishonest and involves letting other people violate your personal right to be treated with respect and dignity.

Aggressive Behavior involves expressing your feelings indirectly through insults, sarcasm, labels, put-downs, and hostile statements and actions. Aggressive behavior involves expressing thoughts, feelings, and opinions in a way that violates others' rights to be treated with respect and dignity.

Assertive behavior involves describing your feelings, thoughts, opinions, and preferences directly to another person in an honest and appropriate way that respects both you and the other person. It enables you to act in your own best interests, to stand up for yourself without undue anxiety, to express honest feelings comfortably, and to exercise personal rights without denying the rights of others. Assertive behavior is direct, honest, self-enhancing self-expression that is not hurtful to others and is appropriate for the receiver and the situation.

Passive	Aggressive	Assertive
<i>Indifferent</i>	<i>Attacks person verbally or physically</i>	<i>Speaks clearly and confidently</i>
<i>Lifeless</i>	<i>Hostile</i>	<i>Honest</i>
<i>Doesn't care</i>	<i>Sarcastic</i>	<i>Deals directly with anger</i>
<i>Avoids the problem</i>	<i>Blaming</i>	<i>Appropriate</i>
<i>"I'm not good enough"</i>	<i>Selfish</i>	<i>Considers the rights of the other person</i>
<i>"It doesn't matter"</i>	<i>Opinionated</i>	<i>Deals with the problem</i>
<i>Builds anger</i>	<i>Acts out in anger</i>	<i>Active</i>
<i>Hopes that needs will be met</i>	<i>Demanding</i>	<i>Cares about self</i>
<i>Lacks confidence</i>	<i>Fighting</i>	<i>Cares about results</i>
<i>Non active</i>	<i>Physical</i>	<i>Cares about the situation</i>
<i>Non aggressive</i>	<i>Emotional</i>	



ACTIVE LISTENING

Students consider strategies that help with listening.

OBJECTIVES

- Students will review effective active listening skills
- Students will identify active listening skills in action

MATERIALS

- Active Listening Handout

TIME

45 min

LESSON INTRO

We spend more time listening than any activity except breathing. How can we do it better?

Active listening is a process in which the listener takes active responsibility to understand the content and feeling of what is being said and then checks with the speaker to see if he/she heard what the speaker intended to communicate.

LESSON STEP BY STEP

1. Say: We spend more time listening than any activity except breathing.
2. Ask the group to briefly share out the different things they listen to throughout the day.

If students say “people talking” push them to break it out into the different things people talk about such as how to do a math problem, what’s for lunch, a friend’s weekend, another person’s memory, a boss’s instructions, etc...

3. Once you have a short list, ask the class to rank the list in order of importance from what you **do** need to listen closely too, to things that you **don’t** have to listen closely too.
4. Explain that as a ‘listener’ they have an active role to take to truly hear and understand. Refer to the top portion of the brainstorm list—the important things--ask students to pair-share with this question: *What problems might arise when people don’t listen well in these scenarios?*

5. After a few minutes, ask groups to share out a main idea from their discussion.
6. Say: We're going to spend some time talking about what you can do to be a good listener. Listening is hard work! And we want to know what do to make sure we're getting the right information.

In general, listening skills fall under a few categories: (write these on the board)

- What your physical body is *doing*.
- What you are *watching* for.
- What you can *say* as a listener.

7. Say: You may already know or do some things that fall into these categories. Share out!
As students share, create lists under each category.
8. Pass out the Active Listening handout. Read aloud, or have students read silently. Ask students to mark 3 strategies that they feel comfortable doing already. Ask students to mark 2 strategies that are new to them.
9. Next, share with students that you are going to model a few of the active listening strategies. As you model, ask students to write down things that you are doing or saying that are examples of active listening skills. They should be prepared to share out these examples afterwards.
10. Students should reference the handout and student-created lists as resources while they observe...
11. Invite one student up to role model with you. This student should be comfortable speaking in front of the class. You can ask one of the prompts, or just talk about a topic of interest to them.
 - Tell me about a recent vacation or trip
 - Tell me about something that you hate doing
 - Tell me about problem you're having
 - Tell me about what it's like to be an only child/oldest child/middle child/youngest child
12. As the student speaks, model great active listening by your body positioning and eye contact, share out your observations of student's body language and tone, and model rephrasing, mirroring, emotion ID, and questioning.

Use phrases such as:

- "It sounds like what you mean is... Is that right?"
- "Are you saying that you're angry/disappointed/glad, because...?"
- "Tell me more about..."
- "Really?"
- "It seems like..."

13. Once you've wrapped up the 'conversation' ask students to share out examples of active listening that they observed.

VARIATIONS

1. Pair this lesson with the lesson on "Clarity". These two lessons paired together can serve to help students experience the frustration of being in a 'poor listening environment'. Missed information impacts the

outcome of the activity. Try doing “Clarity” as it is written, and then again when the listeners are allowed to speak.

REFLECTION & WRAP UP

1. End this lesson with the opportunity for students to practice active listening strategies. Pair up students (or group in triads) and give students either the speaker or listener role. Allow time for students to try out a few of the skills. Acknowledge that practicing these skills can feel funny in the moment, but they should push through and try it out! They might be surprised at what they find!
2. Spend a few moments in solo reflection, students can journal their ideas to one or all of the following prompts:
 - How did it feel to be an active listener?
 - Did anything feel uncomfortable? Why?
 - What was that experience like for you when you were the speaker? Did anything surprise you?
 - What strategy can you do this week to practice being a better listener?
3. Have students create an Info Graphic for the active listening skills that student identify--such as the one here from the Center for Creative Leadership. Place these in the class or communal areas.



NOTES

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ACTIVE LISTENING TECHNIQUES

Body Language

These are non-verbal behaviors that help others know you're listening, and help you focus in. Eye-contact, facing the person speaking, an open body stance, nodding, smiling, and putting away phones or other distractions sends the message that you are paying attention and helps you to be an active listener.

Small Encouragements

These are sounds made to let a person know the other is there and listening. Such as, "Oh?", "When?", and "Really?", "Mmmm". They are questions, comments, or sounds that do not interfere with the flow of conversation but do let others know that you are there and listening. These small encouragements help build trust and encourage others to continue talking.

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is a summary in your own words of what you were told. This demonstrates listening and helps create empathy because it is evident that you have heard and are trying to understand. Paraphrasing clarifies information, highlights important topics, and promotes give and take between you and the speaker. Plus, it helps make you a better listener!

Usually, paraphrasing begins with the words, "Are you telling me..." or "Are you saying..."

Emotion Labeling

This is often the first active listening skill to be used. It is important to tune in to the emotion behind the words and facts. It is a common mistake to get into problem-solving too early. By problem-solving too early, you have likely not listened enough to get all of the information you need, and the other person is often not ready to solve the problem yet. It's ok to make a mistake in labeling emotions. The other person will correct you and will often be grateful for the attempt to understand them.

Common phrases for you to use are, "Are you feeling...", "You sound...", "You seem..." , "I hear...(emotion heard by you)". You do not tell people how they are feeling, but how they sound to you.

Mirroring (or Reflecting)

This is the technique of repeating the last word or phrase and putting a question mark after it. This provides very exact responses because you are using the other person's own words. Reflecting or mirroring allows you to ask the speaker for more information without you guiding the direction of the other person's thoughts. It can get information when you do not have enough to ask a good question. It is useful when you are at a loss for words and it provides an opportunity for the subject to think about what they have said.

Open-Ended Questions

The primary use of open-ended questions is to help a subject start talking. Asking open-ended questions encourages the person to say more. They are questions that cannot be answered with a single word such as "yes" or "no". Open-ended questions usually begin with *how*, *what*, *when* and *where*. Note that "why" questions are not asked directly. "Why" questions tend to steer the conversation toward blame and shut down communication. "Why" questions also tend to pass judgment. Closed-end questions give a feeling of interrogation that makes trust building difficult.

Silence

This begins with waiting until the speaker has completely finished talking, and then pausing. Often people need time to keep thinking to sort out their thoughts. Silence can be very effective on a number of levels. Most people are not comfortable with silence and will fill it with talk. It is to your advantage to keep others talking. Silence can also be used to emphasize a point. You can use silence just before or just after saying something important.

Adapted from On-Scene Guide for Crisis Negotiators, Frederick J. Lanceley, Boca Raton, CRC Press, 1999, pp 20-24.

