

Let's look at some examples.

You-message: "You need to be here by 9:00 A.M. tomorrow."

Sample I-message: "I appreciate it when people come to work on time because we get all the stock work done before the store opens."

You-message: "You are too quiet when my mother is around."

Sample I-message: "When you don't express your opinion to my mother, I feel disappointed because you have such great ideas and she doesn't get to hear them."

You-message: "Here is what you ought to do."

Sample I-message: "If you would follow this plan, I would feel much more comfortable, because that is what Chris asked us to do."

You-message: "You should have chosen a better gift for Danny."

Sample I-message: "When you give a CD with a Parental Advisory label, it means he won't be able to show his parents or play it at home. I'm disappointed that he'll have to keep it a secret."

WHERE CAN I GO FOR MORE INFORMATION?

Alberti, Robert, and Emmons, Michael. *Your Perfect Right*. San Luis Obispo, CA: Impact Publishers, 2001.

Bower, Sharon, and Bower, Gordon. *Asserting Yourself: A Practical Guide for Positive Change*. New York: Perseus, 1991.

Elgin, Suzette Haden. *The Gentle Art of Verbal Self-Defense at Work*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000.

Gordon, Thomas. *Leader Effectiveness Training*. New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell, 1986.

SEE THESE HANDOUTS ON RELATED TOPICS

Building Positive Teen Relationships
Dealing With Peer Pressure (for Teens)
Expressing Feelings Responsibly (for Teens)
Helping Your Child or Teen Manage Stress Life Skills (for Teens)
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Building People Skills (for Teens)
Personal Negotiation Skills (for Teens)
Understanding Body Language (for Teens)
Workplace Skills (for Teens)



Assertiveness Skills (for Teens)



INTRODUCTION

Assertive communication is a constructive way of expressing feelings and opinions. People are not born assertive; their behavior is a combination of learned skills. Assertive behavior enables you to:

- Act in your own best interests
- Stand up for yourself without becoming anxious
- Express your honest feelings
- Assert your personal rights without denying the rights of others

Assertive behavior is different from passive or aggressive behavior in that it is:

- Self-expressive
- Honest



- Direct
- Self-enhancing
- Constructive, not destructive

3 AGGRESSIVE, PASSIVE, OR ASSERTIVE?

Assertive behavior includes both **what** you say and **how** you say it. Let's look at some examples. Read each of the following short conversations and decide whether each illustrates aggressive, passive, or assertive behavior:

Assertive behavior includes both **what** you say and **how** you say it.

Example 1

Lisa: "Listen, I've got a big problem with what you did. I've had it with these stupid mistakes you keep making. You either stop screwing up, or you're finished!"

Schuyler: "Give me a break, Lisa. You know it wasn't my fault."

Lisa: "Yeah, right! All I ever hear from you is excuses!"

Schuyler: "Those aren't excuses, Lisa. They're facts."

Lisa: "When are you going to do it the way I told you to do it?"

Lisa's behavior is **aggressive**.

Example 2

Lisa: "Schuyler, I wish you'd be more careful when you fill out these forms."

Schuyler: "I told you, Lisa, it wasn't my fault."

Lisa: "Oh, I'm sorry. You're right."

Lisa's behavior in this example is **passive**.

Example 3

Lisa: "Schuyler, these mistakes created a big problem for me. I turned in the sheet with your numbers on it and now I feel very embarrassed."

Schuyler: "I told you, Lisa, it wasn't my fault."

Lisa: "I know you've had some problems, Schuyler. But I have to ask you to double-check your work in the future, and make sure it's correct. Will you agree to do that?"

Schuyler: "Sure, I think I can agree to that."

Lisa: "Thanks, Schuyler. I hope this solves the problem."

In this example, Lisa's behavior is **assertive**.

I-messages are a more effective way of communicating than you-messages because they convey less blame and less negativity.

3 WHAT ARE I-MESSAGES?

The I-message is a communication skill that can help you communicate assertively. Let's illustrate how they work with some examples. Think about how you would feel if your supervisor at work spoke to you like this:

"You need to check in with me more often."

"You were rude to that teacher."

"You sure made the wrong decision that time."

Most people would feel talked down to, disrespected, and blamed. These kinds of messages are called **you-messages**, since they begin with "you."

A more effective way to assertively speak to another person is with the **I-message**. Here are some examples:

"When I'm not kept informed about what's going on in your study group, I get worried and start imagining that you're having problems that are not getting solved."

"When you said, 'No, we're all out' without checking the back stock first, the customers thought you didn't care about helping them get what they're looking for."

"When I saw that you'd kept filling in the condiments during that rush of customers, I was upset that you didn't come up front right away."

I-messages are a more effective way of communicating than you-messages because they convey less blame and less negativity. Starting a statement with "I" indicates taking responsibility for the statement. Starting a statement with "you" conveys a feeling of finger-pointing and is likely to make the listener feel defensive.

THREE COMPONENTS:

Behavior

plus

Feelings

plus

Effect on you

I-messages have three components:

1. Identify the **behavior** that concerns you.
2. Describe your **feelings** about it.
3. Describe the **effect** the person's actions have on you.