

A is for **ASSERTIVE vs AGGRESSIVE** behaviour

This resource has been designed by Lyn French, A Space Director, to be used with the emotional learning cards from the set entitled '**A-Z of Emotions**'. Purchase the cards online at www.inivacreativelearning.org

Aggression isn't just about getting into conflicts or disagreements - it can also be evident in how we behave. For example, we may push to the front of the queue or make sure that we're getting our way without consideration for others. Being assertive means we use our anger and aggression but in a mindful and constructive way. For instance, we stand up for our rights and those of others.

- **Give some examples of aggressive behaviour. What are some examples of being assertive?**

Any of us can be aggressive if we are provoked, assertive if we believe in something or someone strongly enough and passive, giving in too easily, if we feel we aren't as good or as deserving as everyone else. The way we behave usually reflects our levels of self-esteem and confidence. These levels go up and down, depending on the circumstances.

- **What experiences or situations lead to a drop in confidence? What boosts our self-esteem?**

Even though our behaviour can differ depending on the circumstances, we may become aware that we're usually a particular type.

- **Can you notice whether you're mostly passive, aggressive or assertive?**

No one is perfect - we all have to develop the ability to observe ourselves and correct our behaviour when its moving too far in one direction or another. Working on our confidence, self-respect and self-esteem is usually part of this.



If we're frequently **passive**, it may be because our self-esteem is low and we feel as if we're not good enough.



If we're often **aggressive**, it could be because we want everyone to believe we're 'a somebody' so that we can believe it too. Underneath, we may suffer from low self-worth.



If we are usually **assertive**, it shows we have respect for ourselves and others.



Label the behaviours below either PASSIVE, AGGRESSIVE or ASSERTIVE

We believe that our needs don't really matter
 We can express ourselves freely & honestly
 We give in too easily to others
 We always put ourselves first
 We don't express our opinion
 We go to any length to avoid disagreements
 We stand up for ourselves

We make sure things are fair for everyone
 We allow ourselves to be pushed around
 We talk over people
 We express our point of view respectfully
 We rarely say what we think
 We behave in bullying ways
 We can compromise and negotiate

If we're too passive, it usually means that people won't respect us as much. Behaving too aggressively too frequently causes conflicts and power struggles. Both passivity and aggression can damage our relationships - being assertive generally improves them. If we're assertive, others know where they stand and can trust us more fully. As well, being assertive means we respect ourselves and others. We have the confidence to negotiate and ensure that our needs are met.

Common patterns of behaviour

Signs of passive, aggressive and assertive behaviour are listed below- label them accordingly.

Having no real goals	Respecting personal space	Acting selfishly a lot of the time
Being afraid to speak up	Being aware of tone of voice	Using intimidating body language
People-pleasing	Ignoring everyone else's wishes	Avoiding eye contact
Participating in groups	Valuing oneself + others	Using a loud, intimidating voice
Blaming oneself all the time	Interrupting & talking over others	Showing little or no expression
Trying to take over	Standing back & withdrawing	Taking responsibility for self
Giving everyone a chance	Being too timid & self-effacing	Reaching goals without pushing others out of the way

How we communicate affects our relationships with others

Saying 'no' is something most of us have trouble with. It feels good to say 'yes' but it can lead to being too passive and cause us to feel resentment. Be clear, direct & considerate when saying 'no'.

'No, I can't do that - I hope you can see it from my point of view.'

What are some examples of situations in which it's hard to say 'no'?



Holding our ground is another sign of effective communication. This involves thinking about what we need to say and repeating it if necessary. Here is an example: *'I would like to talk about what happened yesterday. ... I hear what you're saying but I feel a conversation would be helpful so that we can clear things up.'* **Why is it difficult to hold our ground?**

LEARNING MORE ABOUT OUR BEHAVIOUR AND MAKING POSITIVE CHANGES

It takes time to understand ourselves and to make positive changes in our behaviour so that we get the best out of our lives and our relationships. To help you learn more about feelings in general, you might find it useful to look through the cards in the **A to Z of Emotions**.

These cards feature images made by artists illustrating different feelings and their opposites. Each card also includes a short description of the emotions highlighted followed by questions to reflect on. This can open up thinking and spark off conversation about the kinds of feelings that come up in the course of our lives. Here are some examples from the A to Z of Emotions:

Look at the T card for Tolerant: If we're tolerant of ourselves, we can accept that we'll make mistakes and that things will go wrong. Instead of giving up (behaving passively) or getting angry and blaming others (behaving aggressively), we can ask for support and learn from our experience. This is an example of assertive behaviour.

Look at the V card for Vulnerable: If we're feeling vulnerable, and can talk openly about it, we are showing personal courage. This is another way of being assertive.

Look at the R card for Rejection: If we reject others because of their differences, this can be interpreted as aggressive behaviour.

Look at the M card for Manipulation: Manipulating others so that we get our own way is another example of aggressive behaviour.

Look at the K card for 'Kept in the Dark' If we miss out on learning about emotions, we can be 'kept in the dark'. This means we lack important information about how to relate to others and how to manage our behaviour. Not having this information can lead to either passive or aggressive behaviour.

Look at the L card for Lost: If we don't have personal goals or know our purpose in life, we can feel lost. This can easily lead to passive behaviour.

You might also want to continue building your self-knowledge by looking at cards from our other sets which are listed below:

- *What do you feel?*
- *Who are you? Where are you going?*
- *How do we live well with others?*
- *What do relationships mean to you?*