

PASSIVE, AGGRESSIVE OR ASSERTIVE?

This topic appeals to many of our students because of its certainty – we can define these three terms, look them up in dictionaries, give examples and sort them into piles.

Why

Because of their social processing differences, many of our students are uncertain of times when they may be acting passively or aggressively. By giving clear guidelines for how to explain when something's 'not right' we can help them fix it in a more assertive way, and by sharing our feelings about situations we create more social certainty – 'It's not just me that struggles like this.'

How

- Explain how being assertive means '**standing up for ourselves, but in a way that still makes other people have good thoughts about us**'. Give an example from your life, or make one up involving the students in the room.
- **Encourage the group to explore the definitions of assertive and passive** and note these down for future reference.
- **Explain the bad news sandwich** (previous activity) as a structure for assertive communication.
- **Look at the scenarios on the next page.** Remove any that aren't relevant to your school community and add some of your own. Print out and cut up the cards.
- Each student takes a turn to read out the scenario.
- **Round 1:** everyone makes up an aggressive response – discuss.
- **Round 2:** everyone makes up a passive response – discuss.
- **Round 3:** everyone makes up an assertive response – discuss.
- **Share your answers and discuss the consequences** for everyone 'in the story', then move on to the next scenario.

Extension

- Students write their own scenarios plus a solution and read them out one by one (check them first to make sure they are appropriate; some of our students are uncertain about what information is suitable for sharing in a group).

- Everyone in the group decides if it was passive, aggressive or assertive and discusses other options for a solution. Keep the scenarios for other activities/role play.
- Use the emotions cards (Chapter 4) to decide how the passive or aggressive answers might make other people feel.

Passive, aggressive or assertive scenarios

Your drama teacher has told you again what you need to do for homework, but you still don't understand. You're starting to feel anxious.	Your sister keeps coming to swimming with you and your dad. It's something you really like doing just with him.
Your mum keeps asking you to look after your baby brother in the evenings. You are worried you won't have time to study.	Your friend keeps borrowing money from you and not paying you back. It's starting to bother you.
Your friend keeps posting pictures of you without asking. You're starting to feel annoyed.	Your friend is having a big 16th birthday party. You don't like loud noise but you like your friend. You don't want to go.
One of your friends wants you to keep playing FIFA online, even though you know you're supposed to be doing revision. You're feeling stressed.	You're feeling left out of a friendship group, but then one of them asks you to go and buy food for them. You feel annoyed.
Your teacher tells you off for a rude drawing on a textbook. It was your neighbour who did the drawing.	Your friend keeps messaging you to go out but you don't want to go.
Your dad keeps turning up late to fetch you after running. It stresses you out.	You're out with your friends and it's time for your curfew. You want to go home but you're worried about what they will say.

SOCIAL DILEMMAS

Social differences are harder to talk about than learning differences. Students will happily talk about their struggles with science, maths or languages but it's rare to hear anyone discuss their difficulties understanding the hidden social rules within their school community. These activities are a chance to unpack 'doing the predictable thing' as a group.

Why

Some of our students find it hard to make social predictions and can struggle to balance out what they need or want against what will make other people think good thoughts about them. It can be hard for them to work out what's expected of them in different situations and cause uncertain and uncomfortable feelings. This activity hopes to develop the following ideas:

There are no right answers. The group decides what is usually predicted of us in each situation. This is a useful way to develop someone's tolerance of social uncertainty – we aren't providing a 'set of rules', instead we practise this kind of social problem solving.

People think differently. This can increase a sense of agency (as a result of realising that other people find this tricky too).

Practising 'how' to say something can help us with social predictability. By working out what the options are for each scenario we develop the social part of our brains. We then find it easier to predict the social world and feel more certain.

How

- **Print out and cut up the cards**, remove any that you feel are not appropriate for your community or setting and make up some of your own.
- **Explain** that this is an activity to work on social problem solving.
- **Level 1** uses multiple-choice questions and is easier to access.
- **Students take turns** to read out a social dilemma and the available options.
- **Make the options visible** to all for the rest of the activity, either on a board or on paper.
- **Write down your answers.** Everyone in the group (facilitators included) writes down what they would do in that situation. They can choose from one of the suggested answers, or come up with their own.
- **For each answer ask**, 'What kind of thoughts would the other person/people in this dilemma have about you if you did this?' **Good, okay, weird, annoyed, upset or angry?**

- **For each answer then ask** 'What might happen as a result?' and discuss possible short- and longer-term consequences for every option.

Extension

- Move on to level 2. Once a group is used to the concept via the multiple-choice format, you can progress to open questions that require more individual thought.