

Assertive Communication: A Lesson Plan

Summary:

Children and youth face many conflicts at home and at school. Is there a better way to respond to conflict than our usual 'fight or flight' response?

Children hurt others or hurt themselves when they do not know how to manage conflict in their lives or respect the needs of others. For example, about 160,000 students may stay home on any given day because they're afraid of being bullied. Some students avoid cafeterias, restrooms, and hallways because of their fear of a possible conflict with a bully.

Now more than ever, it is important to equip students with the communication tools and problem solving skills to stay safe, maintain healthy relationships and be well. The following lesson plan is a tool to teach children the difference between aggressive, passive, and assertive behaviors and to practice active listening and using "I messages."

Objectives:

1. To demonstrate an understanding of assertive, passive, and aggressive behaviors
2. To practice assertive communication by being an active listener and using "I messages"

Instruction:

Time: 45-60 minutes

Materials: Easel, flipchart or dry erase board or chalk board; handouts/teacher references, markers

Methods used: Lecture, class discussion, role play, interactive participation

- 1) Conflict and our Responses to Conflict (5 minutes)

Fight or flight is a natural response to conflict. Animals who feel threatened or trapped respond by getting away or fighting to survive. People have learned that fighting is not always the most effective way to handle conflict.

- 2) Three Types of Behavior (10-15 minutes)

Aggressive behavior

Have the class define aggressive behavior and give examples

Aggressive behavior is hurtful.

- Verbal or physical threats or actions
- Fighting
- Bullying
- Gossip

Passive behavior

Have the class define passive behavior and give examples

Passive behavior is avoiding the problem and letting someone be disrespectful to you.

- Ignoring
- Not saying anything
- Letting the other person get what he/she wants.

Assertive behavior

Have the class define assertive behavior and give examples.

Assertive communication is how you can let others know about your needs and wants, and at the same time consider the needs and wants of other people. You stand up for your rights while respecting the rights of other people. It is a win-win situation.

Class Discussion: Which behavior is the most likely to have friends? Aggressive, passive, or assertive?

- 3) Practicing Assertive Communication (15-30 minutes)

Active Listening

Ask the class to review the handout on active listening. Divide into pairs and have one person speak for one minute, the other person listens, then they switch roles.

- What did it feel like when the other person was listening to you actively?
- What did it feel like to be the listener?

I Messages

Review the handout on "I messages".

With the same partners (or change partners), have the class practice the example for "I messages". Then switch roles and try another situation. The pairs may draw situations to use.

4) Class Discussion (5 minutes)

What are some circumstances this is a helpful way to communicate a problem?

How did you feel when you told the person about the problem?

How did you feel when you were told about a problem behavior?

5) Closing (10 minutes)

Summarize main points, explain homework and close by reading quote from Oprah Winfrey.

"Often we don't even realize who we're meant to be because we're so busy trying to live out someone else's ideas. But other people and their opinions hold no power in defining our destiny."-Oprah Winfrey

Teacher Reference: Types of Behavior

Types of Behavior	What does this look or sound like?
Agressive Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbal or physical threats or actions • Fighting • Bullying • Gossip • Engaging in hurtful behavior
Passive Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ignoring • Not saying anything • Letting the other person get what he or she wants • Letting others disrespect you
Assertive Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • letting others know about your needs and wants • considering the needs and wants of other people • standing up for your rights while respecting others

Handout: Assertive Communication Means Being an Active Listener

Traits of an Active Listener	What does this look or sound like?
Encouraging	Use neutral words to help the other person say more about the situation and how they feel.
Reflective	State in your own words what you hear the other person saying, including their feelings and needs.
Understanding	<p>Listen carefully and clarify anything that is not clear. Ask nonjudgmental questions.</p> <p>Use eye contact. Your body language and gestures need to show that you are interested and listening.</p> <p>Give the person time to speak. If you ask a question or make a statement, wait for a response.</p> <p>Give the person your complete and undivided attention.</p> <p>Focus on what the person is saying without interrupting, correcting, advising, or telling your own story.</p>

Handout: Assertive Communication Means Using I Messages

Do all conflicts end in violence?

Conflicts between people are common but this does not mean that conflicts must result in anger or violence. This lesson teaches how to use assertive language to handle the conflict in a non-threatening way.

What is an "I message"?

Use "I messages" to intervene when there is a relationship problem (examples: teasing, gossip, horsing around, arguing, being rude, lying). This is a solution-focused, respectful way of letting the person know of your concerns and what you want to see happen.

- Use eye contact
- Tell the person: "I have a problem..."
- Describe the problem or behavior in a non-threatening way. "When you do this... I feel"
- Tell the person how you feel about the problem. "I feel..."
- Then ask two questions: 1) "If you continue this behavior, will it make our relationship better or worse? and 2) Do you want our relationship to get better or worse?"

What can I say to a person if I have a concern?

Practice the following examples of "I messages":

- "I have a problem and need to talk to you." (Wait for response.)
- "When you argue with me after I ask you to stop, it makes me feel frustrated." (Wait for response.)
- "If you continue to argue after I ask you to stop, will it make our relationship better or worse?" (Wait for response.)
- "Do you want our relationship to get better or worse?" (Wait for response.)

Handout: Homework Assignment

Instructions: Use active listening and I messages outside of class and write about your experiences. Try your skills on a friend, an adult, and a family member.

	Experience 1	Experience 2	Experience 3
Who?			
What?			
Where?			
When?			
How?			
Why?			
What happened?			
How did you feel?			

Homework Questions:

What did you learn about using active listening?

What did you learn about using I messages?

How can you use these skills?