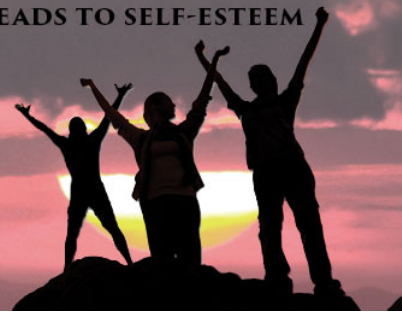


FEELING GOOD ABOUT YOU

THE JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY
THAT LEADS TO SELF-ESTEEM



Module 3 – Worksheet 4

Passive, Assertive or Aggressive

Passive, assertive, and aggressive: These are three words you have probably heard many times, but may not be familiar with what they mean or how they fit into your life.

All three words refer to modes of behavior and ways of approaching and dealing with life. You act in a *passive* manner when you choose to ignore or suppress your own needs in order to meet the needs of others. You were probably taught to be passive as a child. In return for being quiet, "not rocking the boat," not "making waves," and being cooperative and undemanding, the significant adults in your life met your physical needs, and hopefully your emotional needs as well. It was a bargain, of sorts, where you were a good boy or girl, and in return they made you feel valuable, lovable, and safe.

Being passive involves giving away your personal power and trusting others to meet your needs. Sometimes this works and sometimes it doesn't. One thing it does is slowly erode your self-esteem and sense of being a capable, competent person.

Take Jason for example. As a child he was raised to always be cooperative and never say no to others. Now, as a 34-year old adult, he has trouble standing up for himself. When a coworker asks him to cover for her and work an extra shift, Jason says, "OK, I guess so, if you really need me." He gave this response even though he already had plans that he would now have to cancel. He chose to be passive and meet the needs of another at the expense of his own.

You act *assertively* when you choose to stand up for yourself without attacking or putting down another person. It's a conscious choice to take responsibility for meeting your own needs, while also choosing to not take away the rights of others in the process. Assertive behavior enhances your sense of personal power and self-esteem. If Jason had chosen to respond assertively when asked to work late, he could have said, "No, I can't. It's not convenient for me tonight." This response would have met his needs without attacking or harming his coworker.

You can act aggressively when you choose to meet your own needs at the expense of others, or when you purposefully attack or demean others in the process of taking care of yourself. Aggressive behavior temporarily increases your sense of personal power, but decreases your self-esteem.

Back to Jason, he could have acted aggressively by saying, "Absolutely not! I can't believe you're so lazy as to leave early and expect others to cover for you! I'll never understand why you were hired in the first place!" With this response Jason would certainly have made his point that he wasn't free to work, but also unnecessarily attacked his coworker in the process.

We all have moments when we act in each of these three ways. However, the healthiest and most conducive to personal growth is to be assertive most of the time. When you choose to act assertively, the people in our life may initially resent their loss of control over you, or be angry that you are now putting yourself first and them second. They may try to "make you feel guilty" about your behavior, and label you as "selfish, inconsiderate, unsympathetic, and uncaring." Their goal is to evoke guilt so you will stop whatever you are doing to take care of yourself and resume taking care of others.

When you become assertive other people might try to control you by laying down guilt or acting wounded and suffering. It's important to notice when this happens, and know that *you have a right to take care of yourself and meet your needs.* *Always* give yourself permission to do this regardless of the reactions of others.

This worksheet will help you identify situations in which you are passive, assertive, and aggressive. Take some time to think about different occasions when you have behaved in these various ways, and then write in the spaces below:

The people I am passive with are:

These people reinforce this passive behavior by:

When I am passive I feel:

When I am passive my body feels:

The people I am assertive with are:

These people reinforce this assertive behavior by:

When I am assertive I feel:

When I am assertive my body feels:

The people I am aggressive with are:

These people reinforce this aggressive behavior by:

When I am aggressive I feel:

When I am aggressive my body feels:

I feel best about myself when:

I will take these steps to insure that I always act in the way that helps me feel best about myself:

Reflections on Passive, Assertive, and Aggressive Behavior

- When you choose to be passive you suppress your own needs and wants and allow others to control you.
- As a child you might have been taught to be passive in order to meet the needs of others.
- When being passive you give away your personal power and expect others to meet your needs.
- Being passive erodes self-esteem.
- Being assertive is standing up for yourself without attacking or putting down others.
- Acting assertively is a conscious choice that helps you meet your own needs.
- Being assertive enhances personal power and self-esteem
- Aggressive behavior is an attack on another person.
- Aggressive behavior decreases self-esteem.
- **You have a right to take care of yourself and meet you own needs!**