

Assertive Communication and Anger Management

Harry Mills, Ph.D.

As a social emotion, anger is experienced through communication. Angry people tend to have distinct communication postures that they habitually take up when communicating with others. Psychologists have described four of these communication postures, each possessing its own motto:

- The **Aggressive** communications posture says:
"I count but you don't count."
- The **Passive** communications posture says:
"I don't count."
- The **Passive-Aggressive** communications posture says :
"I count. You don't count but I'm not going to tell you about it."
- The **Assertive** communications posture says:
"I count and you do too."

As you might guess, angry people tend to use the Aggressive and Passive-Aggressive postures a whole lot. Aggressive communicators are more likely to start an argument than they are to get the results they want achieved, however. Being passive in your communications is also a mistake, as it communicates weakness and tends to invite further aggression. The Assertive communications posture is the most useful and balanced of all the postures as it is the only posture that communicates respect for all parties. Communicating assertively is the most likely way to ensure that everyone involved gets their needs taken care of. Learning how to become assertive rather than aggressive or passive-aggressive is an important step in discovering how to communicate appropriately with others.

People who are habitually aggressive tend to fundamentally misunderstand what it means to be assertive. Specifically, they tend to confuse assertiveness with aggression, and think they already are acting assertively. This is frequently a mistaken impression however. Both aggressive and assertive communications postures can involve fierce and persuasive communication. They are fundamentally different things, however, in that aggressive communication tends to go on the offense – it attacks and berates the other – while assertive communication uses anger and fierceness only in defense. Assertive people stand up for themselves and their rights and do not take crap from others. However, they manage to do this without crossing the line into aggressiveness; they do not attack the person they are

communicating with unnecessarily. Assertiveness is "anger in self-defense" whereas aggressiveness is "anger because I feel like it".

People who are habitually aggressive tend to fundamentally misunderstand what it means to be assertive. Specifically, they tend confuse assertiveness with aggression, and think they already are acting assertively. This is frequently a mistaken impression however. Both aggressive and assertive communications postures can involve fierce and persuasive communication. They are fundamentally different things, however, in that aggressive communication tends to go on the offense – it attacks and berates the other – while assertive communication uses anger and fierceness only in defense. Assertive people stand up for themselves and their rights and do not take crap from others. However, they manage to do this without crossing the line into aggressiveness; they do not attack the person they are communicating with unnecessarily. Assertiveness is "anger in self-defense" whereas aggressiveness is "anger because I feel like it".

People who are habitually aggressive tend to fundamentally misunderstand what it means to be assertive. Specifically, they tend confuse assertiveness with aggression, and think they already are acting assertively. This is frequently a mistaken impression however. Both aggressive and assertive communications postures can involve fierce and persuasive communication. They are fundamentally different things, however, in that aggressive communication tends to go on the offense – it attacks and berates the other – while assertive communication uses anger and fierceness only in defense. Assertive people stand up for themselves and their rights and do not take crap from others. However, they manage to do this without crossing the line into aggressiveness; they do not attack the person they are communicating with unnecessarily. Assertiveness is "anger in self-defense" whereas aggressiveness is "anger because I feel like it".