

Well-being this Week

FOR EDUCATORS • BY EDUCATORS

I can't believe they said that to me!

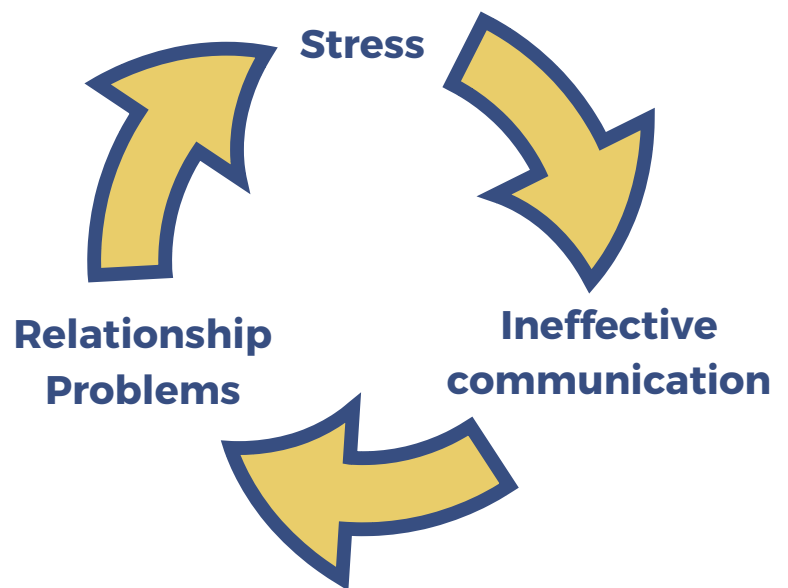
Tips for communicating more effectively to decrease stress

by Lisa Sanetti, PhD

Last edition focused on improving time management to decrease stress. If time management is the top stressor, poor relationships is a close second! Ineffective communication is a big contributor to relationship problems.

How stress, communication, and relationships are related

Ineffective communication leads to relationship problems, which leads to stress. When stressed, it's more difficult to communicate effectively & relationship problems persist!



FACTS:



There are four primary communication styles.

We all use all of them sometimes.

An assertive communication style is most effective.

Communication Styles

Imagine you are at a movie & the person sitting next to you keeps talking.

Passive

Passive communication occurs when you deny your own needs and hold back your real feelings.

<silence>

Aggressive

Aggressive communication occurs when you get angry, attack others verbally, raise your voice, or use sarcasm.

"You'd better stop talking, you moron, or I'll kick your @\$%!"

Passive-
Aggressive

Passive-aggressive communication occurs when you express yourself indirectly and often in ways that are not very nice.

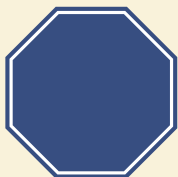
*LOUD SIGH...
...LOUD SIGH...
...LOUD SIGH*

Assertive

Assertive communication occurs when you let other people know your feelings and desires, but do so in an appropriate, courteous way.

"Please stop talking. I am having trouble hearing the movie. Thank you."

STOP & THINK



Are you comfortable...

- ...expressing your interests, opinions, & feelings?
- ...disagreeing with others, saying no, & taking a stand?
- ...asking others for favors?
- ...accepting compliments & talking about yourself?
- ...asking for clarification?

If you answered "no" to any of these, you may need practice being more assertive.

STEP 1: Think assertively.



Before you are ready to *behave* assertively, you need to be able to *think* assertively.

Assertiveness is as much a frame of mind as it is a set of communication skills.

Unassertive, maladaptive, illogical, exaggerated thoughts:



Assertive, adaptive, logical, reasonable thoughts:

"I'm not as good or important as other people."

"I'm just as good as everyone else. My feelings matter just as much as anyone else"

"I should *never* put my own needs ahead of others."

"I have the right to put my own needs ahead of others' without explaining myself"

"I should be perfect."

"I can't be perfect. To err is human. Everyone makes mistakes and that is ok"

STEP 2 Communicate assertively.

1

I statements.

You've likely heard of them before, & maybe have taught them to students, but do you use them?

WHAT

- Foundation of assertive communication; you speak for yourself while remaining objective.
-

HOW

- Acknowledge the **FACTS** of the situation.
- Acknowledge that how you **FEEL** about the situation is your point of view, and not necessarily how everyone else sees it.
- State your viewpoint in a way that does not blame or put down other people.

Situation	Example	Your I Statement
You need to confront someone about their behavior	You find out a co-worker is talking about you behind your back.	
You feel someone is treating you unfairly	Your supervisor allowed your colleague to take a half day but didn't approve your request.	
Someone is angry with you.	You call a parent about their child's performance and they yell at you.	

2

D.E.A.R.

No, not "drop everything and read," but Define, Express, Ask, and Reinforce.

WHAT

- Foundation of assertive problem-solving; situations when there is a disagreement are those that most often require assertiveness.
-

HOW

- **DEFINE** the problem. Explain the situation using objective facts-what happened and what the problem is.
- **EXPRESS** your feelings. Use *I statements* to let the other person know how you feel.
- **ASK** for what you want. In a fair, concise, and firm way, tell the person what you want.
- **Provide REINFORCEMENT.** Let the person know you appreciate their help.

Situation: Shonda, a veteran STEM teacher, retired. You hired John, a 1st year STEM teacher to team with veteran teacher, Iris (Humanities). Iris doesn't want to mentor John and refuses to allow him any input in day-to-day decisions. John doesn't agree with Iris' behavior management approach. They currently aren't speaking.

Define	
Express	
Ask	
Reinforce	

3 Resolving conflicts & standoffs

Even when you are assertive using *I statements* and DEAR, conflicts and standoffs may persist. These strategies may help.

Broken record



When someone denies your assertive request, respectfully but firmly restating your point each time there is an opportunity. If the other person gets angry or brings up past/other issues, acknowledge that you've heard what they've said and become a broken record.

When you reach a standstill, it's an assertive move to point this out then ask the other person how they think the problem should be resolved.



Time outs



When you sense the other person becoming upset, an assertive move is to refuse to continue the conversation until the other person is calm.

When the other person changes the subject, an assertive move is to point out what's happening in the conversation and bring it back to what you want to discuss.



Practice!

Match the assertive strategy to each example.

1. Broken record
2. D.E.A.R.
3. I Statement
4. Pointing to the process
5. Time-out
6. Turning the tables

___ A. You: "I've decided that I'd prefer not to be in charge of planning the retirement party."

Other: "You'll find the time to do it."

You: "I appreciate that, but I'd prefer not to be in charge of the retirement party."

Other: "You know it's not good to go back on your word"

You: I realize I am changing my mind, but I'd prefer not to be in charge of planning the party."

___ B.

"I can see you are very upset right now. Let's continue this discussion later today."

___ C.

"It looks like we are going around in circles here. I originally agreed to plan the party, but changed my mind after giving it some thought. How can we get past this?"

___ D.

"I see that we are getting off topic. We were talking about the retirement party."

___ E.

"You asked me to throw a retirement party for Linda, who is retiring next month. I don't really want to do it because it will take up a lot of time and I'm really busy with work and being a single mom. I feel overwhelmed; planning this party is the last thing I need to be doing. I'd like someone else to take over the party, or at the very least I'd like to have a co-planner. It would be a better party if someone else planned it or I had help. "

___ F.

"I don't like saying no to people, and so I said I would plan this party last week, but I feel overwhelmed right now and need help."

1.A., 2. E., 3. F., 4. D., 5.B., 6.C.

STEP 3: Monitor your progress!

Complete this form whenever you're in a situation that calls for assertiveness. In the first column, enter the date and time. Next, briefly describe the situation. In the third column, enter the names of any key people involved in the situation. Then check whether you handled the situation assertively or not and describe what you did. Finally, briefly note what you might have done to handle the situation even better or more assertively.

Date/ Time	Situation (brief description)	Key People Involved	Assertive? (brief description what I did)	Thoughts about How I Handled the Situation
March 3, 2023	Asked to organize a retirement party.	boss, me	Y <input checked="" type="radio"/> N Said "yes" without thinking about it. Felt like I had to be a team player.	Not great. Overwhelmed at what I need to do now.
March 14, 2023	Student asked me to donate to their church group by buying chocolate bars.	student, me	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Y N Explained that although I love to support our students, I can't donate to everyone's groups, so I don't donate to any.	Feel good about being honest with student; thought they'd be upset, but they were not.

Date/ Time	Situation (brief description)	Key People Involved	Assertive? (brief description what I did)	Thoughts about how I handled the situation
			Y N	
			Y N	
			Y N	
			Y N	
			Y N	
			Y N	

Date/ Time	Situation (brief description)	Key People Involved	Assertive? (brief description what I did)	Thoughts about how I handled the situation
			Y N	
			Y N	
			Y N	
			Y N	
			Y N	
			Y N	

Date/ Time	Situation (brief description)	Key People Involved	Assertive? (brief description what I did)	Thoughts about how I handled the situation
			Y N	
			Y N	
			Y N	
			Y N	
			Y N	
			Y N	

STEP 4: Reflecting on your communication

Consider your communication styles over the situations you logged. Were you assertive? Passive? Aggressive? Passive-Aggressive? Do you see any patterns? Are there particular people you have more trouble being assertive with?

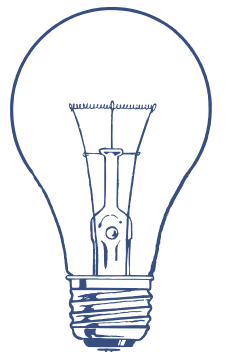
Well-being this Week Take-Aways



Relationships are a key driver of our well-being. For many, connection is a core value. Effective communication is essential to maintaining good relationships and living a values-aligned life.



When you communicate your point of view assertively, especially when there is a conflict or disagreement, you may not always get what you want, but you will leave the situation knowing you appropriately stood up for yourself.



Well-being work isn't selfish. It's necessary.