

An Instant Help Book for Parents & Kids

Cool, Calm, and Confident

A Workbook to Help Kids Learn
Assertiveness Skills



40

simple, fun

activities to teach kids to:

- Handle teasing with confidence
- Stop bullying in its tracks
- Build self-esteem

LISA M. SCHAB, LCSW

Cool, Calm, and Confident

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Introduction

Dear Reader,

You are going to meet all different kinds of people in your life. Some you will want to be friends with and some you won't. Some will be easy to get along with, and some will be difficult. Some will treat you with kindness and respect, and some will treat you rudely or unfairly.

You will discover that there is usually not much you can do to change other people or to make them act just the way you want them to. But when you use your energy to work on your own behavior, you can experience great success in getting along with others.

One of the best ways to get along with people is to learn how to act assertively. This means that you speak and act in ways that help you protect your rights but that you consider other people's rights as well. It means that you treat yourself with respect and you also treat other people with respect. Acting assertively isn't necessarily something you are born with, but it is something you can learn.

It is easier to have the strength and courage to act assertively when you feel good about yourself inside. Many of the activities in this workbook are designed to help you recognize your self-worth, your strengths, and your right to stand up for yourself.

Part of acting assertively is communicating with others in a positive and fair way—listening as much as you speak, expressing your feelings in an appropriate way, and using good manners. It also means solving problems and settling disagreements by using skills like taking responsibility for your actions and seeing things from another person's point of view. Activities in this workbook can teach you how to do this.

Many kids are teased about one thing or another at some time in their lives. When you act assertively you can handle playful teasing without letting it bother you too much. You can also disarm harmful teasing by asking others for help. If you are a person who acts aggressively by bullying or teasing other kids, the activities in this workbook can teach you how to communicate in more caring and mature ways, and help you do a better job of making and keeping true friends.

This workbook teaches ideas and skills, but you must practice them and put them into action in order for them to work. If you think of learning assertiveness like any other subject you study, you know that you will get out of it as much as you put in. Be patient with yourself and keep trying, and you can succeed. Good luck!

Lisa M. Schab, LCSW

Activity 1

Three Communication Styles

For You to Know

There are three main styles of talking and behaving that people use to communicate with each other: passive, aggressive, and assertive. The style that is considered the healthiest, the most fair, and the one that helps people get along with each other best is the assertive style.

When Passive Patsy wants something, she hints about it instead of asking directly. "I wish I had some yummy strawberries like you do," she whispers while she sits next to her friend at the lunch table.

Aggressive Aggie takes what she wants without asking. "Give me some of your strawberries!" she says loudly as she grabs some of her friend's berries.

Assertive Aser asks politely and directly for what he wants. "May I please have one of your strawberries?" he asks his friend. "I could trade you for some of my grapes."

Passive communicators like Patsy often sound whiny. They tend to say they agree with other people's ideas even if they really don't, but then they get mad when other people tell them what to do. They often complain about being unhappy and blame other people for it. They let others make decisions for them. They might feel like their opinions don't count.

Aggressive communicators like Aggie often sound mean, and they hurt other people in trying to get what they want. They may be argumentative and loud and put other people down. They can be insulting and cruel. They make decisions for other people without considering their feelings. They take like their opinions are always right and there is no room for any other ideas.

Assertive communicators like Aser sound like they are trying to be fair. They say what they want, but they listen to and think about what other people want, too. They take responsibility for their thoughts, feelings, and actions without blaming others. They make decisions for themselves. They believe that their opinions count and so do other people's.

For You to Do

Patsy, Aggie, and Aser all want to swing on the swings, but other kids are already on them. Circle in yellow all the statements you think Patsy would say. Circle in red all the statements you think Aggie would say. Circle in blue all the statements you think Aser would say.

I just won't swing today.

I'd like to swing. Is anyone almost done?

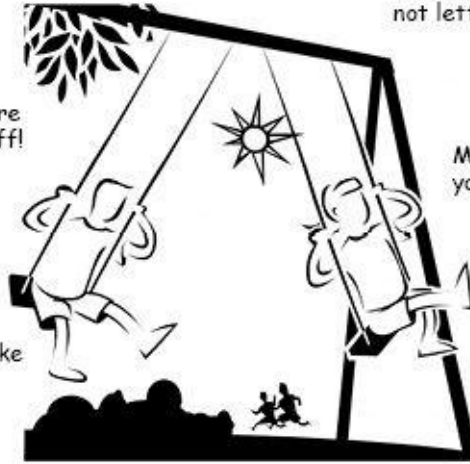
Those kids are mean for not letting me swing.

You've been on there long enough. Get off!

May I swing when you're done?

Do you want to take turns swinging?

It's my turn, so move over!



Get off that swing now!

I don't deserve to swing anyway.

Circle the name of the child you'd most like to be friends with, and tell why.

Patsy Aggie Aser

Circle the name of the child who is most likely to get into trouble, and tell why.

Patsy Aggie Aser

Circle the name of the child or children you'd like to invite to your birthday party, and tell why.

Patsy Aggie Aser

Circle the name of the child you think is most likely to get to swing first, and tell why.

Patsy Aggie Aser

Circle the name of the child you think is most likely to get to swing last, and tell why.

Patsy Aggie Aser

...And More to Do!

Look at the following pictures and read the statements that describe how the children might respond. Next to each statement, write “P” if you think it is an example of passive communication, “AG” if you think it is an example of aggressive communication, or “AS” if you think it is an example of assertive communication.



“Hey, gimme that pencil!”

“Thanks for sharing your pencil.”

“My pencil broke and I don’t know what to do.”



“I wish we could watch cartoons instead of this.”

“Get rid of this show. I’m watching cartoons.”

“Can we watch cartoons when this show is over?”



“I’m sorry. I wasn’t watching what I was doing.”

“Oh no, help! I’m so klutzy.”

“Who told you to sit there, dummy!”

Pretend that your job is to be a communications observer. Use the following chart or make one like it. For the next day or two, write down the names of people you see and record whether you think they are communicating passively, aggressively, or assertively. Write at least one statement they use that helps you choose your answer.

Activity 2

Your Thoughts Affect Your Actions

For You to Know

People's actions are influenced by the way they think and feel. If they think happy thoughts, they tend to act in happy ways. If they think unhappy thoughts, they tend to act in unhappy ways. It is easier to communicate in a healthy assertive style when you are thinking happy thoughts.

Bart, Ben, and Betty are triplets. They look a lot alike, but most of the time they don't act alike. Every morning, Bart feels a little scared. He doesn't like going to school because he is afraid the other kids won't like him. He also worries that they might make fun of him if they know he is afraid. When Bart arrives at the playground, he is thinking a lot of unhappy thoughts about being rejected. He is afraid that if he asks to join in the softball game, the kids will say no. So instead of asking, he just grabs another child's catcher's mitt and says loudly, "Now it's *my* turn to be catcher!" The other kids think Bart is mean, but they are afraid of him, so they let him play.

Ben is as scared as Bart. Sometimes he lies in bed so long that he misses the school bus. His mom gets mad because she has to drive him to school, which makes her late for work. He doesn't like going to school because he is afraid the other kids will make fun of him or not want to be friends with him. When Ben arrives at the playground, he is thinking a lot of unhappy thoughts about being rejected. He worries that if he asks to join in the softball game, the kids will say no. So instead of asking, he sits down under a tree at the edge of the field. A girl who notices Ben thinks because he is just sitting there, he doesn't want to play. Ben thinks no one likes him because no one asks him to play.

Betty is concerned about making friends, too. She wants kids to like her and sometimes worries that they won't, but she thinks happy thoughts. She knows that she is a nice person and that if she acts nicely, kids should want to be around her. Even though she feels a little scared, she puts on a smile and feels hopeful that she will have a good day. When she arrives at the playground, she is thinking about what fun she might have. She wonders if the other kids will let her join in the softball game, so she taps one boy's shoulder, smiles at him, and asks if it's all right if she plays. The boy sees her friendly smile, and says, "Sure. You can get in line to bat."

For You to Do

Think about how Bart, Betty, and Ben each handled the situation with the softball game. Then answer the questions under each child's name.

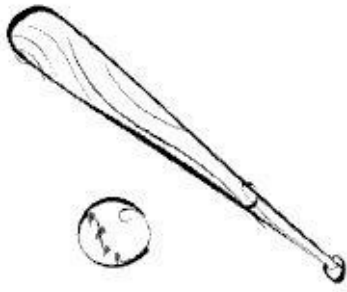
Bart

Why do you think Bart acted so meanly or aggressively? _____

How do you think Bart feels about himself? _____

What do you think the other kids think about Bart? _____

What thoughts would have made Bart feel better and act differently? _____



Ben

Why do you think Ben acted so meekly or passively? _____

How do you think Ben feels about himself? _____

What do you think the other kids think about Ben? _____

What thoughts would have made Ben feel better and act differently?

Betty

Why do you think Betty acted so nicely or assertively? _____

How do you think Betty feels about herself? _____

What do you think the other kids think about Betty? _____

What thoughts did Betty have that made her feel good and act nicely? _____

... And More to Do

What kinds of thoughts can you tell yourself that would help you feel happy about yourself? Write three examples here.

What kinds of thoughts can you tell yourself that would help you feel unhappy about yourself? Write three examples here.

When you are thinking happy thoughts about yourself, it is easier to feel good about yourself, make friends, and get along with others. It is easier to stand up for yourself, feel equal to others, and act assertively, respecting your own rights and those of other people, too.

Pretend you are approaching a group of kids with whom you'd like to play. Write some happy thoughts that could make you feel good about yourself and the kids.

Tell how you could speak or act assertively to see if you can play with them.

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