

Dealing With Chronic Passive-Aggression

Trying to help someone correct their passive-aggressive behaviour requires patience and a nonthreatening approach. This is because people who communicate in this way often feel unsafe being direct – we need to be aware of any past experiences or trauma that may be causing their behaviour.

5 Steps for Addressing Passive-Aggressive Behaviour



1. Get Calm

Before talking to the person:

- Self-regulate and use positive self-talk.
- Take note of the person's pattern of passive-aggressive behaviour.
- Shift judgement to curiosity:
 - What makes it hard for them to speak their mind?
 - How can I make it safe for them to express their true feelings?



2. Make It Safe

Using a nonconfrontational tone, describe the most recent situation in which you've seen them be passive-aggressive. Also ask about their intentions or interpretation, and acknowledge their experience by paraphrasing what they're saying. Also be sure to answer any of their questions.

Note: Make sure you fully understand their perceptions, worries, and expectations before moving to the next step.



3. Find Common Purpose

Have a conversation about how you can help the person find ways to meet their needs and your own. Also explain how being more direct about their needs would benefit themselves and those around them.

Finish this step by explaining how passive-aggressive behaviour impacts their ability to reach their goals.



4. Discuss the Pattern and Initiate Change

Explain that you've seen a pattern of this kind of behaviour, and invite the person to act differently in the future. Also ask what they would need to make this happen.



5. Personally Commit

Your actions may reinforce the pattern, so try to find out if anything you have been doing is triggering the passive-aggressive behaviour. Commit to any changes you can make to improve your communication.