

# Communication Styles E Book



## About the authors



Flora and Mel have over 60 years of experience in the dental profession as registered Dental Hygienists and Dental Therapists, and as Dental business consultants.

Both have worked for two highly acclaimed US-based dental practice management consultants, touring the UK delivering business/dental management programmes bespoke to dental practice clients.

We have spent years helping dental practices like yours build and grow their business through proven consultancy methods. In more recent years we have freshened up the traditional consultancy approach and blended modern practical tools and techniques such as NLP to ensure personalised embedded learning and change management.

This is largely supported through our membership academy which is designed for the whole team to learn at their own pace and style of learning and being part of the academy ensures that you have evergreen content at your fingertips.

# Contents

Page 4: The Communication Styles

Page 5: Passive Communicators

Page 6: Aggressive Communicators

Page 7: Passive-Aggressive Communicators

Page 9: Assertive Communicators

Page 10: Overview conclusion

Page 11: Notes

# The Communication Styles

Our ability to understand different communication styles and be flexible in our own style allows us to create stronger relationships with others. It allows us to communicate more effectively with all styles and reduce the risk of communication breakdown or failure.

To understand others, we must first understand ourselves. We need to know our own style to support our actions and identify how we can be at our best.

Did you know there is a wealth of evidence that links good social connection and wellbeing?

It is documented that those who feel connected have lower rates of depression and anxiety, live longer and have increased job performance and so on.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2860146/>

When you consider communication concerning patient care, we need our messages to be clear and meaningful to the patient's level of knowledge and delivered in a way to pique their interest. It's no good churning out the same spiel about fillings, gum disease etc. and expect your patients to get fully on board with all your advice and recommendations. It is vital to understand how people 'tick' in order to recognise how to modify our own style, language or behaviours.

The other side of communication is of course when our patients are providing information. You should always aim to seek clarity and understanding by using reflective questioning and paraphrasing to reduce the gaps in understanding. Patients will have stronger rapport and commitment to you if you can understand exactly what they are trying to tell you.

Identify the 'gaps' in your own communication style. Ask yourself 'What assumptions do I make? Do I give enough detail or too little? Am I flexible in my mindset?

Communication is multifaceted and a good place to begin is to understand the four communications styles because this will allow for better conversations.

While a person can learn and practice a certain style, people tend to have a habitual style

The 4 Common styles:

1. Passive
2. Aggressive
3. Passive-Aggressive
4. Assertive

## Passive Communicators

Behaviours - Apologetic and sometimes bashful, these individuals tend not to make eye contact and may have a 'go with the flow' type response. They are sensitive and find it hard to say no.

Verbal cues will include constant apologies, sighs and mumbles.

In the workplace these individuals want everyone to get along and may not speak out and do not like conflict.

### What's needed?

Allow the passive communicator time, never interrupt them, listen carefully and then paraphrase to demonstrate your investment in hearing what they have to say.

An example might be 'If I am hearing you correctly, you would consider going ahead with the restorations if it can be done first thing in the morning?'



Look out for the non-verbal signs too.

Crossed arms and frowning may seem like closed-off body language causing you to mirror and potentially send the signal that you are not listening. Recognise the cues and remain open and neutral, and smile which will allow the passive individual to feel heard.

# Aggressive Communicators

Behaviours - often dominate the conversation, often overpowering and resulting in failing to listen to others. It's high emotion, low empathy, loud and demanding.

You will notice them talk over others, interrupt others, and fail to listen.

Non-verbally, finger-pointing, stares and glares and head shaking to prove a point.

This style will commonly create resistance, both from patients and team members.

## What's needed

If you are recognising this as you, then you have taken the first steps to transform yourself into a collaborator from firstly being self-aware. It does take time and effort to adapt your behaviours but it's worthwhile to be more effective with others. You will have to take time to pay attention to others, allow others to voice their thoughts and feelings and when you do so you will be on the path of learning to have awareness of others.



### **Breathe and decompress your emotions before giving your opinion or take on a scenario.**

When you are communicating with an aggressive communicator you will have to hone your assertiveness skills.

Keep the pace of the conversation, avoid counterforce as things will escalate and likewise don't get walked all over. Get your points over respectfully in a calm and clear way, maintain self-control, listen and answer their questions or explain what is needed to create a win-win.

If an individual is aggressive to the point of unacceptable then do call them out and explain that their behaviour will not be tolerated.

# Passive- Aggressive Communicators

Behaviours - Appear passive on the surface but reveal characteristics of resentments in subtle or indirect ways.

Often a passive-aggressive individual will use sarcasm, facial expressions that don't match their words and words that don't align with their actions.

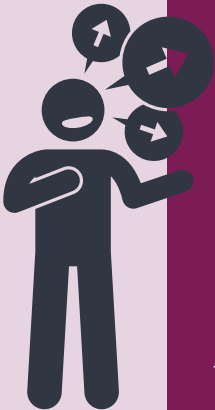
Often these individuals find it difficult to acknowledge emotions.

After saying something rude they may follow up with 'I was only joking

## What's needed

Remember the individual might adopt a style that creates them to approach every situation with negativity and aggression but are likely to hide it behind passive indirect behaviour.

It can be confusing for the listener so be prepared, allow for natural consequences. If their behaviour is causing a concrete negative effect, then avoid using 'You messages' and use an 'I message' instead. 'You messages' can cause the person to feel attacked and you will be less likely to get a solution.



### **You Message**

'You aren't doing the scheduling properly which is causing everyone to work late'

### **I Message**

'I feel frustrated at the numbers of emergency patients that are being added to the end of the day instead of the planned blocks because it is causing the nurses to always be running late and having to stay late'

The I message brings the problem up in an objective manner without directly accusing or placing blame

**Do not respond to a passive-aggressive by being passive-aggressive!!  
Remain calm!**

When a passive-aggressive communicator is providing you with information, aim to look beyond the behaviour and interpret the message they are trying to say. Acknowledge what they say but give no credence to the negative parts.

Imagine a patient, that tells you all about their negative experience with their last dentist. They suggest they were incompetent because the dentist did not indicate the costs and timings of the procedure planned.

A good objective response could be 'I am understanding you felt more information was needed. I would aim today to provide you with an examination and in the event of any treatment recommendations, I will provide you with the risks and benefits, a procedure outline and a treatment estimate outlining my fees. You will have the opportunity to ask any questions and decide if you wish to proceed. I trust this meets your satisfaction?'



## Assertive Communicators

Behaviours - Have effective and healthy ways to express themselves. They can encourage open and honest dialogue whilst considering the needs of others. It's like they have the ability to remain in the neutral zone between passive and aggressive to get the best out of every situation and person.

These individuals can converse in a way that respects the rights and opinions of others and allows for strong relationships, clarity and momentum.

Commonly you will notice an assertive communicator uses 'I' statements, can express their desires and needs with confidence, encourages a balanced conversation, and maintains good eye contact.

### What's needed:

To be assertive, do not judge or exaggerate.

Use 'I statements', by avoiding starting a sentence with 'You' so that the feeling of judgment is dramatically reduced.

### Patient Education Example



"You need to clean in between your teeth because your gums are bleeding and inflamed and you are leaving a lot of bacteria behind"

"I can see your toothbrush is doing a great job on the main surfaces of your teeth and gums, if it's ok with you I would like to introduce you to a small brush to clean in between your teeth and help reduce the inflammation that's there"

**Don't forget to listen to aim to ascertain what the other person is trying to say.**



As you gain a deeper understanding of the styles think about scenarios within your workplace or individual's traits and consider how you might respond differently now.



Examining the 4 styles allows us to consider how the first three styles may create challenges or even problems.



Remember we all have a choice on how we will react in any given situation. We also constantly learn and evolve, and our styles can change and grow with life experiences.



We can learn and improve our communication skills. The first step is recognising the styles and then developing our style to suit the situation.



Begin with self-awareness to understand your own tendencies and needs. Then work on your assertiveness training and express yourself or communicate with your patients and team in a confident caring manner.

We wish you the biggest success in your journey to mastering communication.

Love from Mel & Flo



**LOVE YOUR  
DENTISTRY**

**Notes**

A series of horizontal dashed lines for writing notes, spanning the width of the page.