

This handout provides scripts and strategies for addressing indirect aggression early to prevent escalation into direct aggression.

Addressing Indirect Aggression Through Assertive Communication

Indirect aggression may manifest as gossip, subtle undermining, exclusion, or passive-aggressive remarks. Recognizing these behaviours assertively is crucial not only for maintaining a healthy work environment but also for your mental well-being. Ignoring indirect aggression or responding with unassertive behaviour can negatively impact your self-esteem and sense of self-worth^[1].

The good news is that assertiveness is a learned skill and can be practiced. It involves communicating your needs, opinions, and emotions while respecting the rights of others.

Try practicing the script below on your own or with a friend to enhance your assertive communication skills.



Tips for Effective Assertive Communication

- **Stay Calm:** Take a moment to breathe and regulate yourself before responding.
- **Use “I” Statements:** Focus on how the behavior affects you (e.g., “I feel...” or “I need...”).
- **Be Specific:** Address the behavior and its impact directly.
- **Listen Actively:** Encourage a two-way conversation to understand the other person’s perspective.
- **Practice Regularly:** Use these scripts in various situations to build confidence.

Response Strategies

1. **When You Hear Gossip:** *“I overheard some comments about [Topic]. I value transparency and teamwork, so I’d appreciate it if we could address any concerns directly. Can we talk about this openly?”*
2. **When You Experience Subtle Undermining:** *“I noticed that during our last meeting, some of my contributions were downplayed. I believe we all bring valuable insights to the table. Can we ensure everyone’s ideas are respected moving forward?”*
3. **When You Feel Excluded:** *“I felt left out of the discussion regarding [Situation]. I’d like to be involved and contribute my thoughts. Can we ensure everyone is included in future conversations?”* OR *“I’ve noticed that certain discussions exclude my input which makes me feel undervalued. I believe my experience in social services could contribute positively. Can we create a more inclusive environment in our meetings?”*
4. **When Responding to Passive-Aggressive Remarks:** *“I sensed some tension in your comment about [Specific Comment]. If there’s something on your mind, I’m open to discussing it. It’s important for us to communicate openly.”*
5. **When Expressing Your Feelings:** *“When you said that, it made me feel dismissed and confused. I value your input, but I’d appreciate a more constructive approach.”*
6. **When Asking for Clarification:** *“Could you help me understand your perspective? I want to ensure we’re on the same page.”*
7. **When Setting Boundaries:** *“I’d like to set a boundary regarding how we discuss our work. I prefer direct feedback in private rather than comments during meetings.”*
8. **When Redirecting the Conversation:** *“I think we can focus on solutions rather than pointing out problems. What do you think would work best?”*
9. **When Responding to Gossip about others:** *“I’ve heard some negative remarks about [Name]. I believe it’s important to support each other in our roles. Let’s focus on discussing ways to work collaboratively instead.”*
10. **When Addressing Unclear Criticism:** *“I’ve received some feedback that felt unclear and unconstructive. Could we discuss specific examples so I can understand how to improve my work?”*

Empowering Yourself through Assertive Communication

Regardless of how others may react when you communicate your needs, focus on advocating for yourself. By doing so, you take proactive steps to ensure your well-being and show kindness to yourself by not allowing others to treat you with aggression. No matter their responses, you can take pride in your efforts to foster a healthy environment. Ultimately, your actions can inspire others to prioritize collaboration and communicate with respect.

Do your best to use these assertive scripts to address indirect aggression in the workplace effectively, fostering a supportive and collaborative environment in the social services sector. Practice these responses to enhance your communication and self-advocacy skills.

Reference

1. Michel, Fiona. *Assert Yourself*. Centre for Clinical Interventions, 2008.

Additional Resources

- Assertiveness | Center for Clinical Interventions
- Bullying & Harassment | WorkSafeBC