



Connie Podesta's

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Life Would Be Easy...Series Part 9

Dealing With the Passive-Aggressive Personality? You Got This!

By Connie Podesta

In any situation where you suspect passive-aggressive behavior, you must begin by first taking a close look at yourself and your dominant communication style. This is NOT to excuse them in any way, because their behavior is definitely unhealthy, non-productive, and usually hurtful. But we need to take an honest look at our own behavior to determine if we are possibly contributing to an environment that allows passive-behavior to grow and thrive. Passive-aggressives are reacting to us and to what they believe we are doing to them or have done to them.

If we are using aggressive behaviors—**HURT and ANGER**—we often make it difficult, even impossible – for people to feel comfortable communicating assertively with us. In other words, we may be the ones who literally pushed them underground in order to survive. Responding to a constant barrage of manipulation takes great skill, courage, self-esteem and even a sense of humor. So the first step in dealing with the passive-aggressive is to make sure YOU are providing a safe, assertive environment for them when dealing with you.

Now, on to the part where you are doing everything right—and they still are coming after you full throttle. You need to understand how they think. These guys usually play for keeps. They want to even a real or imaginary score and will do almost anything to make that happen. It is very unhealthy behavior considering the fact they are even willing to hurt or diminish themselves in the process. They live with a scoreboard and know no other way.

Let's start with some assertive strategies keep these people from engaging you in their twisted plans and negative ways.

Dealing with the Passive-Aggressive Person

In order for someone to be motivated to seek revenge, they must identify an injustice done to them – real or not. We did not necessarily do them any wrong, but they perceive and believe our behavior to be inappropriate, unacceptable, unfair, or unjust. Sometimes they are right.

Nevertheless, their covert, devious reaction is still not excused. But now we have a place to start when trying to diffuse the passive-aggressive.

“What can I do to stop it?”

Passive-aggressives are usually people who believe their lives are controlled by others, but they lack the skill, knowledge, desire, and/or confidence necessary to be assertive. They are also people who learned to be underhanded at an early age and are amazingly adept of sabotage to get their needs met. To minimize their attacks, be as assertive as possible. Most passive-aggressives find it no fun to deal with someone who will openly and honestly call them out about their behavior. (Ha! Where’s the sport in that-RIGHT?) Passive-aggressives rely on the fact that we will not want to take them to task for manipulative ways. And they are usually right.

Be aware that passive-aggressive behavior almost always produces a desire for us to be passive-aggressive in right back. Tempting – but don’t. We are responsible for our actions. That means we must make a conscious decision to not simply react or behave in a way that just feels good for the moment. We need to weigh the choices so both our actions and our communication serve to **enhance** our relationships rather than **destroy** them.

The only time it is beneficial to ignore negative behavior is when you are dealing with someone who is giving you the silent treatment. The same technique works on children, friends, and co-workers. First, tell them you are totally aware of their attempts to get even with you for some “injustice.” Then go about your business and just let them sulk until they decide to deal with the problem in a more mature, assertive way. Trust me - you will be okay.

Next, tell them what you expect! Let's repeat this because it is so important--Passive-aggressives are not used to being held accountable for their behavior. So what are we to do? Challenge them positively! But be ready for the counter-attack. For example, how do you respond when someone who is behaving inappropriately disagrees with you in a public forum? This is one of the hardest – and most critical – times to be assertive and not give in or give up.

The best assertive response to a passive-aggressive person who openly disagrees with you is, “Thank you. I appreciate your willingness to tell me how you feel face-to-face.” We might as well hear what they are thinking about us to our face because they are saying it behind our back anyway.

Never doubt that passive-aggressives are at war with us. And they love the feel and excitement of battle--as long as it's not face-to-face combat. They are really far too afraid deep down to deal with people and situations assertively and maturely. Therefore it is very important to recognize and understand where their anger, resentment, hurt, etc. is coming from. Unless we know how they feel, we will never be able to plan a successful strategy to improve the relationship.

As with our children, the more a person understands what is expected of them and taught why those rules and expectations are relevant to their future well-being, the less likely they are to engage in passive-aggressive behavior. And it's fair and necessary to let them know what the consequences will be if those expectations are not met. Remember this -- the more the person is involved in the process, the more they will understand about accountability and responsibility for one's actions.

There is never a winner with passive-aggressive behavior, only losers. Do not ignore passive-aggressive behavior or it will get worse. Remember how I said before that we help to train difficult people? (Good grief let's stop THAT!) Know that just as with other communication styles, the only way to effectively deal with the passive-aggressive is to be ASSERTIVE.

Be prepared though, because they will surely test your assertive limits. If you can deal with them and their manipulations--your life will be much easier.

Here's your homework...Take Action!

Is there someone in your life that deserves to be taught a lesson? Are you tempted to get even by using passive-aggressive behavior? If so, how could you communicate your feelings more assertively? Watch for passive-aggressive behavior in your relationships at work and home. Notice how destructive it is. Think about ways you could improve communication.

Do you have someone in your life that is being passive-aggressive to you? Do you know why? Think about how you could begin to communicate more assertively and productively with them. Have you let them know you are aware of their behavior?

When do you resort to passive-aggressive, underhanded and devious behavior? Come on now--honestly. We all do it once in a while. Recognize who and what sets you off down this path and figure out how to change YOUR behavior. Getting even is short term at best and it definitely doesn't show a side of you that is worth of the type of person you want to be!

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