



ASAP

A Systemic APProach to social media
and pre-adolescents through thinking

ASAP EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME
LEARNING UNIT

COMMUNICATION

Building bridges with empathy and assertiveness



Co-funded by
the European Union



COMMUNICATION:
**Building bridges with empathy and
assertiveness**

LEARNING UNIT

Erasmus+ Programme

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ASAP - A Systemic Approach to social media and pre-adolescents through thinking skills education

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R3.2.1 ASAP Educational Programme Handbook

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Learning Unit

Communication: Building bridges with empathy and assertiveness

FOCUS OF THIS UNIT

Introduction

Developmental shifts in cognitive and psychosocial development in the period of preadolescence go hand in hand with intensified development of communication and interpersonal skills. These are of utmost importance for preadolescents to successfully navigate the challenges and developmental tasks in this period.

In this learning unit, we focus on developing empathy and assertive behaviour (communication). Empathy helps preadolescents form and sustain meaningful relations with peers, while the ability of behaving (communicating) assertively, on the other hand, is essential for them in the process of transitioning to independence and towards forming strong identity. Both skills go hand in hand and complement one another: empathy enables individuals to connect with others, while assertiveness empowers them to stand up for themselves, fight for their rights and pursue their goals.

Key Competences

Key Competences* (which the Unit aims to contribute to)	
General	Specific
PERSONAL: Self-regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness and expression of personal emotions, thoughts, values, and behaviour. • Understanding and regulating personal emotions, thoughts, and behaviour, including stress responses.
SOCIAL: Empathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of another person's emotions, experiences and values. • Understanding another person's emotions and experiences, and the ability to proactively take their perspective. • Responsiveness to another person's emotions and experiences.
SOCIAL: Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding and managing interactions and conversations in different socio-cultural contexts and domain-specific situations.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listening to others and engaging in conversations with confidence, assertiveness, clarity and reciprocity, both in personal and social contexts.
SOCIAL: Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding the importance of trust, respect for human dignity and equality, coping with conflicts and negotiating disagreements to build and sustain fair and respectful relationships.
LEARNING TO LEARN: Growth mindset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness of and confidence in one's own and others' abilities to learn, improve and achieve with work and dedication. Reflecting on other people's feedback as well as on successful and unsuccessful experiences to continue developing one's potential

**Defined according to the LifeComp and DigComp 2.2 Frameworks*

Learning outcomes

Learning outcomes	
Knowledge	Skills and Abilities
Understanding the concept of empathy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to respond with empathy when another person is facing a difficult situation.
Understanding the characteristics of active listening.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to recognise when a person is listening actively. Ability to demonstrate active listening skills.
Understanding perspective-taking as part of empathy (cognitive empathy), which relates to another person's point of view, grasping that person's thinking and feeling.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to adopt perspective taking (by active listening, imagination etc.) to understand another person's point of view.
Understanding the characteristics of passive, aggressive and assertive behaviour (communication)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to recognise the corresponding response style (passive, aggressive or assertive) in a problem situation. Ability to propose alternative assertive response in problem situations with inappropriate passive or aggressive responses. Ability to provide and demonstrate examples of passive, aggressive and assertive responses for a given problem situation.
Understanding the elements and structure of "I-messages" in the context of assertive communication.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to communicate assertively by using "I-messages".

Understanding the impact of assertive behaviour (communication) on the self and others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to enhance self-awareness and self-esteem, to improve problem solving and interpersonal relations by fostering assertive behaviour (communication).
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Work plan

Topic 1 – Empathy		
Phase 1.a (Knowledge building and skills development)	Activity 1.a.1 – Active listening Objective: to understand the difference between active and non-active listening, to practice active listening skills and to explore the impact of active and non-active listening on the narrator.	45 min
	Activity 1.a.2 – Walk in someone else's shoes Objective: to help participants develop empathy and understand the importance of considering other people's perspectives and consequently contribute to efficient conflict resolution and stronger interpersonal relationships.	45 min
Topic 2 – Assertive behaviour*		
Phase 2.a (Knowledge building)	Activity 2.a.1 – Exploring different behavioural responses to challenging situations Objective: To raise awareness and understanding of the differences between passive, aggressive and assertive behavioural responses to challenging situations and to search for examples of each style.	45 min
	Activity 2.a.2 – Recognising response styles and anticipating alternative responses Objective: To further elaborate the understanding of different response styles (passive, aggressive and assertive) and to search for alternatives in case of inappropriate/unacceptable responses.	45 min
Phase 2.b (Skills development)	Activity 2.b.1 – I-messages Objective: To learn about communicating assertively by using I-messages.	45 min
	Activity 2.b.2 – Role play Objective: To identify and demonstrate different response styles (passive, assertive, aggressive) to a given problem	45 min

	situation and to reflect on the differences across the response styles.	
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Evaluation

Objective:

Assess improvements in interpersonal communication (active listening, clarity of message, assertive expression, perspective-taking) and the ability to choose safe, respectful communication strategies in different contexts.

Methods and tools:

Standardised self-report instrument (Toronto Empathy Questionnaire – TEQ) as provided in the annex; educators’ structured observation notes during activities and debriefs focusing on listening behaviours, turn-taking and use of “I-messages”.

Timing:

TEQ administered at the start and at the end of the unit; observation recorded continuously during the activities and summarised in the final debrief.

Roles:

Kids complete the TEQ and participate in debriefs; educators administer the instrument, conduct observations, and compile the evaluation summary.

Application contexts

The proposed activities related to empathy (phase 1.a) can be used independently one from another and can be adjusted to different target groups, contexts and settings (e.g. school setting, home setting, workplace setting). Active listening skills (activity 1.a.1) and perspective-taking skills (activity a.1.2) can be practiced in different combinations (kid-kid, kid-educator, kid-parent etc.) to improve empathy, mutual understanding and dialogue among the participants. Themes and topics of storytelling (activity 1.a.1) can be adapted and adjusted to the context and setting. Problem scenarios for practicing perspective-taking skills (1.a.2) are now designed to include disputes among the preadolescents and their parents as they often share different opinions about the use of internet and social media. The problem scenarios may help preadolescents better understand the opinions and feelings of their parents and vice versa, thus facilitating dialogue and trust and strengthening their relationship. The problem scenarios can also be changed and adapted to different contexts and settings.

The activities related to assertive communication (phases 2.a and 2.b) have been placed in the context of social media and designed in a way to encourage the participants to respond assertively when faced by a challenge related to the use of internet and social media. Examples and scenarios to be used for the implementation of the activities have been adjusted to the specifics of preadolescents. When used with adults, those examples and scenarios might be changed to better address their needs (for example, to incorporate more examples from the workplace or home settings). Ideally, the proposed activities 2.a.1, 2.a.2, 2.b.1 and 2.b.2 should be implemented in that given order, especially when implemented with preadolescents. Of course, some of the activities can be shortened or merged, based on the level of pre-existing knowledge. When implemented with adults (parents, educators) or

in case of a solid pre-existing knowledge, certain activities can also be implemented as stand-alone activities, for example activity 2.b.1 on I-messages.

Links with other LUs

- **Emotions:** links interpersonal communication with emotional awareness, regulation, and empathetic listening.
- **Power of Questions:** improves clarity and mutual understanding through open, neutral questioning.
- **Authenticity & Authority:** connects communication with credibility, source evaluation, and honest self-expression.
- **Onlife:** addresses digital communication (tone, privacy, audience, platform norms).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Cognitive and psychosocial development in pre-adolescence

Preadolescence is the period of accelerated cognitive and psychosocial development. In terms of cognition, preadolescence is characterized by a major shift from the stage of concrete to the stage of formal operations according to Piaget's theory of cognitive development. In the stage of concrete operations (ages 7 to 11), the child is already capable of taking multiple perspectives (e.g. they consider the height and width of a glass simultaneously when evaluating the volume of water). The child understands that the way he sees the world is not necessarily identical to how others see it. In that time the child is also becoming capable of reciprocity and empathy (Hasan et al., 2019)¹. Thinking and reasoning is focused on concrete objects with limited transferability to different contexts. In the stage of formal operations, which begins to develop after the age of eleven or with the beginning of preadolescence, the child develops the ability to think abstractly, through the development of deductive and inductive thinking (reasoning from general to specific and vice versa), which affects the ability to solve hypothetical problems through setting and testing hypotheses (Sanghvi, 2020)².

The development of thinking does not occur in all individuals in the same way and at the same speed. Some individuals are said to never reach the fourth stage of development (that is, the development of formal operations). Likewise, an individual's ability to think formally and logically can be very limited to a narrow area and impairs the ability to transfer to other areas (Levesque, 2011)³. In other words, some preadolescents may have already progressed in the stage of formal operations, while others remain in the previous stage, which needs to be considered when designing interventions with preadolescents (for instance, some may be struggling with abstract concepts like privacy, personal rights etc.).

The psychosocial development of preadolescents takes place on several levels. This period is characterized by higher emotional vulnerability and more intense emotions. In connection with increased emotional sensitivity, there is also an increased vulnerability to reacting negatively to rejection by peers and the level of conformity increases. In early adolescence, the intensive development of self-awareness and the distinction between the public and private self begins (von Tetzchner, 2022)⁴.

According to Erickson, the period of (pre)adolescence encompasses two developmental crises, diligence (competence and confidence) versus inferiority (5-12 years) and identity versus identity

¹ Hasan, Z., Hasan Babakr, Z., Mohamedamin, P., & Kakamad, K. (2019). Piaget's Cognitive Developmental Theory: Critical Review. *Education Quarterly Reviews*, 2(3), 517–524. <https://doi.org/10.31014/aior.1993.02.03.84>

² Sanghvi, P. (2020). Piaget's theory of cognitive development: a review. *Indian Journal of Mental Health*, 7(2).

³ Levesque, R.J.R. (2011). Formal Operations. In: Levesque, R.J.R. (eds) *Encyclopedia of Adolescence*. Springer, New York, NY. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-1695-2_543

⁴ von Tetzchner, S. (2022). *Typical and Atypical Child and Adolescent Development 7: Social Relations, Self-awareness and Identity*. Taylor & Francis.

confusion (13-19 years) (Orenstein & Lewis, 2022)⁵. The proper resolution of the latter is associated with a reduced identification with parents and an increase in the importance of other social relationships in finding one's place in the wider social context. A positive transition through this social crisis leads to a mature identity, whereas a suboptimal transition leads to role confusion and uncertainty about one's identity. Erickson (1968, cited in Arnett, 2015)⁶ sees the importance of the period of preadolescence, and even more so adolescence, in the transition from a safe environment in the primary family to the development of independence.

Developmental shifts in cognitive and psychosocial development in the period of preadolescence, described above, go hand in hand with intensified development of communication and interpersonal skills, empathy and assertive communication in particular. These are of utmost importance for preadolescents to successfully navigate the challenges and developmental tasks in this period.

Empathy and assertive behaviour

According to APA Dictionary of Psychology⁷ “empathy can be defined as understanding a person from their frame of reference rather than one's own, or vicariously experiencing that person's feelings, perceptions, and thoughts. Empathy does not, of itself, entail motivation to be of assistance, although it may turn into sympathy or personal distress, which may result in action.” From the above definition it is evident that empathy consists of two parts which are often referred to as cognitive and affective empathy. Cognitive empathy is the ability to accurately recognize and understand what others feel. Affective (or emotional) empathy is the ability to share/feel the emotions of another, while maintaining a self-other distinction (Davis, 1983)⁸. For example, if a friend is upset because they failed an exam, cognitive empathy allows you to understand why they are upset, even if you don't feel the same emotional distress yourself. On the other hand, if you see someone crying, affective empathy might make you feel sad or distressed as well, because you emotionally resonate with their feelings.

Assertive behaviour is described as any action that promotes an individual's own best interests, such as standing up for oneself without undue anxiety, expressing feelings comfortably, or asserting one's rights without infringing on the rights of others. In contrast, unassertive behaviour indicates a person's difficulty in advocating for themselves, expressing their desires, needs, thoughts, and emotions. Assertiveness can be viewed as existing on a continuum, where problems may present as either excessive agreeableness (i.e., submissiveness) or excessive hostility (i.e., aggressiveness). Consequently, the aim of assertiveness interventions is to help individuals articulate their desires

⁵ Orenstein G. A., Lewis, L. (2022). Eriksons Stages of Psychosocial Development. [Updated 2022 Nov 7]. In: StatPearls [Internet]. Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing; 2022 Jan. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK556096/>

⁶ Arnett, J. J. (2015). *Emerging adulthood: The winding road from the late teens through the twenties*, Second edition. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

⁷ <https://dictionary.apa.org/empathy>

⁸ Davis, M. H. (1983). Measuring individual differences in empathy: Evidence for a multidimensional approach. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 44(1), 113-126.

effectively in various life situations, rather than being either submissive (passive) or aggressive (Speed, Goldstein & Goldfried, 2018)⁹.

Being assertive is not easy, but assertive behaviour can be learned and practiced. When we need to stand up for ourselves, we often fear being perceived as too selfish, that others might not accept us, and therefore we may subordinate our own needs to those of others. In expressing our feelings, desires, and demands, we might also be too impatient, harsh, or argumentative, or we may place our own needs above those of others. Thus, the opposite of assertive behaviour includes, on one hand, passive, submissive, and withdrawn behaviour, and on the other hand, aggressive, rude, and attacking behaviour. Most people use different styles of behaviour and communication; however, only assertive behaviour provides a sense of satisfaction and self-esteem and allows for good relationships with others (Tacol et al., 2019)¹⁰.

The role of empathy and assertive communication in risk prevention and coping

Supporting preadolescents to further develop and enhance empathy and assertiveness may contribute to the prevention of misuse/abuse of social media (Internet) and to more effective coping in case of being a victim of misuse/abuse of social media (Internet). According to the findings of several studies, a person with well-developed empathy is less likely to victimize another person. For instance, a study by Jolliffe and Farrington (2006)¹¹ found a significant negative correlation between empathy and bullying behaviour among youth. This is because empathetic individuals are more sensitive to the emotional experiences of others and are therefore less likely to inflict harm. Next, the systematic review conducted by Van Noorden, Haselager, Cillessen & Bukowski (2014)¹² suggests that different aspects of empathy should be considered to predict various aspects of bullying-related behaviour. The results showed that bullying was negatively associated with cognitive and, in particular, affective empathy. Victimization was negatively associated with cognitive empathy but not with affective empathy.

Also, if an assertive person becomes a victim of misuse/abuse of social media (or cyberbullying) they would more likely cope with the situation better, compared to the ones who do not have the capacity to stand up for themselves. Assertiveness is linked to better coping strategies in situations of social conflict, including cyberbullying. For instance, literature review conducted by Yosep et al. (2024)¹³

⁹ Speed, B. C., Goldstein, B. L., & Goldfried, M. R. (2018). Assertiveness Training: A Forgotten Evidence-Based Treatment. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 25(1).

¹⁰ Tacol, A., Lekić, K., Konec Juričič, N., Sedlar Kobe, N., Roškar, S. (2019). Priročnik za preventivno delo z mladostniki. Zorenje skozi To sem jaz: Razvijanje socialnih in čustvenih veščin ter samopodobe. NIJZ, Slovenija.

¹¹ Jolliffe, D. & Farrington, D. P. (2006). Examining the Relationship Between Low Empathy and Bullying. *Aggressive Behaviour*, 32, 540-550. Available at: <https://faculty.buffalostate.edu/hennesda/bullying%20and%20empathy.pdf>

¹² van Noorden, T. H., Haselager, G. J., Cillessen, A. H., Bukowski, W. M. (2014). Empathy and involvement in bullying in children and adolescents: a systematic review. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 44(3), 637-657. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-014-0135-6>

¹³ Yosep, I., Suryani, S., Mediani, H.S., Mardhiyah, A., Maulana, I., Hernawaty, T., Hazmi, H. (2024). A Scoping Review of Assertiveness Therapy for Reducing Bullying Behavior and Its Impacts Among Adolescents. *Journal of Multidisciplinary Healthcare*, 17, 1777-1790. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC11048288/>

showed that assertiveness interventions, carried out in the form of education, games, and role play, can significantly reduce exposure to bullying behaviour and its negative impacts (such as anxiety) and contribute to increasing self-esteem. In a study with adolescents, Giménez-Gualdo et al. (2018)¹⁴ found that assertive children are more likely to employ positive coping strategies, such as reporting cyberbullying incidents to parents, educators, police, and ICT service providers. This aligns with a study by Tankamani and Jalali (2017)¹⁵, which demonstrated a positive relationship between assertiveness and the use of problem-focused coping strategies.



¹⁴ Giménez-Gualdo, A. M., Arnaiz-Sánchez, P., Cerezo-Ramírez, F., & Prodócimo, E. (2018). Teachers' and kids' perceptions about cyberbullying. intervention and coping strategies in primary and secondary education. *Comunicar. Media Education Research Journal*, 26(2), 29-38. doi: <https://doi.org/10.3916/C56-2018-03>.

¹⁵ Tankamani, N., & Jalali, M. (2017). A Comparative aggressiveness and assertiveness in coping styles kids. *International Journal of Applied Behavioral Sciences*, 4(2), 8-12. doi: <https://doi.org/10.22037/ijabs.v4i2.15591>.

HOW THE UNIT WORKS

Topic 1: Empathy

The aim of the proposed activities of the phase 1.a is primarily to enhance the level of empathy among the participants, cognitive empathy in particular, but also to build knowledge in that domain. Hence, the activities 1.a.1 and 1.a.2 mainly focus on skills development but also on raising awareness and building fundamental knowledge about empathy, active listening and perspective-taking.

Cognitive empathy is often referred to as perspective-taking or “putting yourself in another person’s shoes”. It involves seeing things from another person’s point of view and grasping how they might be thinking and feeling. This can be achieved in different ways; one way to do it is by adopting active listening while having a conversation. The proposed activities in phase 1.a are designed to practice and improve active listening skills (activity 1.a.1) and perspective-taking skills (activity 1.a.2), thus contributing to further development of empathy.

What will the participants learn?

- Difference between cognitive empathy (perspective-taking) and affective empathy
- Perspective-taking methods and tools
- Characteristics of active and non-active listening
- The role of (cognitive) empathy in interpersonal relationships

Learning outcomes

Knowledge:

- To understand the concept of empathy.
- To understand the characteristics of active listening.
- To understand perspective-taking as part of empathy (cognitive empathy), which relates to another person’s point of view, grasping that person’s thinking and feeling.

Skills and abilities:

- Ability to respond with empathy when another person is facing a difficult situation.
- Ability to recognise when a person is listening actively.
- Ability to demonstrate active listening skills.
- Ability to adopt perspective taking (by active listening, imagination etc.) to understand another person’s point of view.

Space configuration

Ideally, there should be enough space for the participants to implement practical exercises in pairs and triplets without interference with the other participants. For the discussion and closure sections, participant should sit in a circle or semi-circle (if feasible) to facilitate interaction and exchange of their experiences and insights.

Methods and pedagogical techniques used

- Pre-comprehension and explanation
- pair work and pair discussion

- Work in triplets
- Whole-group discussion

Tools

- Blackboard or flipchart
- PPT presentation with instructions
- Problem scenarios for activity 1.a.2: each pair of participants should be given one problem scenario (two copies of a problem scenario card – one for each participant in a pair).

Overview of the activities

Activity 1.a.1 – Active listening

In this activity, kids explore the difference between active and non-active listening. By working in pairs and reflecting on communication behaviours, they experience how attentive listening influences understanding, relationships, and the emotional state of the speaker. Educators guide kids in practicing active listening techniques such as maintaining eye contact, asking clarifying questions, and showing empathy.

Detailed step-by-step instructions for this activity are provided in Activity Plan in the Annex.

Activity 1.a.2 – Walk in someone else's shoes

This activity helps kids develop empathy and understand the importance of considering other people's perspectives. By engaging in discussion and reflection, kids recognize how different viewpoints shape behaviour and emotional reactions, contributing to stronger interpersonal relationships and more effective conflict resolution.

Detailed step-by-step instructions for this activity are provided in Activity Plan in the Annex.

Topic 2: Assertive behaviour

The aim of the proposed activities of the phases 2.a and 2.b is to empower the participants to behave and communicate assertively and to make them aware that the way we respond (communicate) is our choice and responsibility. Sometimes it seems that certain stimuli (situations) automatically trigger certain responses, however, this is not the case. In each situation, we can choose how to respond to a given situation – either by passive/submissive, aggressive or assertive behaviour. Although it is not possible to fully separate the activities for developing skills from the activities for building knowledge, it is safe to say that phase 2.a mainly focuses on building knowledge, while phase 2.b mainly focuses on developing skills.

The proposed activities 2.a.1, 2.a.2, 2.b.1 and 2.b.2 have been adjusted and modified based on the manual prepared by Tacol et al. (2019)¹⁶. Ideally, they should be implemented in a given order, starting with the activity 2.a.1, continuing with activity 2.a.2 and so on, as they are designed for participants to

¹⁶ Tacol, A., Lekić, K., Konec Juričič, N., Sedlar Kobe, N., Roškar, S. (2019). Priročnik za preventivno delo z mladostniki. Zorenje skozi To sem jaz: Razvijanje socialnih in čustvenih veščin ter samopodobe. NIJZ, Slovenija

gradually proceed from simpler towards more complex activities, from building knowledge to developing skills.

What will the participants learn?

- Differences between passive/submissive, aggressive and assertive behaviour (communication)
- Differences between I-messages and YOU-messages
- Characteristics and the impact of assertive behaviour (communication) on the self and others

Learning outcomes

Knowledge:

- To understand the characteristics of passive, aggressive and assertive behaviour (communication)
- To understand the elements and structure of “I-messages” in the context of assertive communication.
- To understand the impact of assertive behaviour (communication) on the self and others.

Skills and abilities:

- Ability to recognise the corresponding response style (passive, aggressive or assertive) in a problem situation.
- Ability to propose alternative assertive response in problem situations with inappropriate passive or aggressive responses.
- Ability to provide and demonstrate examples of passive, aggressive and assertive responses for a given problem situation.
- Ability to communicate assertively by using “I-messages”.
- Ability to enhance self-awareness and self-esteem, to improve problem solving and interpersonal relations by fostering assertive behaviour (communication).

Space Configuration

Ideally, there should be enough space for the participants to implement practical exercises in pairs and triplets without interference with the other participants. For the discussion and closure sections, participant should sit in a circle or semi-circle (if feasible) to facilitate interaction and exchange of their experiences and insights.

Methods and Pedagogical Techniques

The methods used in this phase will include:

- pre-comprehension and explanation,
- individual work
- pair work and pair discussion
- work in small groups (groups of 4-5 participants)
- whole-group discussion

Tools

- Blackboard or flipchart
- PPT presentation
- monitor or projector
- worksheets

Overview of the activities

Activity 2.a.1 – Exploring different behavioural responses to challenging situations

Kids reflect on different behavioural responses — passive, aggressive, and assertive — in challenging situations. Through group work and practical examples, they learn to identify characteristics of each style and become more aware of their own communication patterns. Educators support kids in understanding how response styles influence outcomes in conflicts and everyday interactions.

Activity 2.a.2 – Recognising response styles and anticipating alternative responses

In this activity, kids deepen their understanding of passive, aggressive, and assertive response styles by analysing different communication scenarios. They work together to recognize inappropriate or ineffective responses and suggest more constructive alternatives. Educators encourage critical thinking about the impact of each style on conflict resolution and relationship building.

Activity 2.b.1 – I-messages

Kids learn to communicate assertively using “I-messages” — a structured way of expressing feelings, needs, and expectations without blaming others. Through practice and reflection, kids build skills for managing conflicts respectfully and reducing misunderstandings. Educators guide kids in formulating their own I-messages based on real or imagined situations.

Activity 2.b.2 – Communication styles (Role play)

Through role-playing, kids apply their knowledge of passive, assertive, and aggressive response styles to real-world problem situations. They identify and demonstrate different behaviours, reflect on their emotional effects, and explore alternative, more effective ways of responding. Educators facilitate reflection on the differences across styles and encourage kids to practice assertiveness in daily life.

Detailed step-by-step instructions for these activities are provided in Activity Plan in the Annex.

Evaluation tools

To evaluate the achievement of the learning outcomes related to development of skills, we propose two sets of measures: standardized instruments and observation.

1. STANDARDISED INSTRUMENTS

The Toronto Empathy Questionnaire¹⁷

Below is a list of statements. Please read each statement carefully and rate how frequently you feel or act in the manner described. Circle your answer on the response form. There are no right or wrong answers or trick questions. Please answer each question as honestly as you can. (Never = 0; Rarely = 1; Sometimes = 2; Often = 3; Always = 4.)

1. When someone else is feeling excited, I tend to get excited too
2. Other people's misfortunes do not disturb me a great deal (R)
3. It upsets me to see someone being treated disrespectfully
4. I remain unaffected when someone close to me is happy (R)
5. I enjoy making other people feel better
6. I have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me
7. When a friend starts to talk about his\her problems, I try to steer the conversation towards something else (R)
8. I can tell when others are sad even when they do not say anything
9. I find that I am "in tune" with other people's moods
10. I do not feel sympathy for people who cause their own serious illnesses (R)
11. I become irritated when someone cries (R)
12. I am not really interested in how other people feel (R)
13. I get a strong urge to help when I see someone who is upset
14. When I see someone being treated unfairly, I do not feel very much pity for them (R)
15. I find it silly for people to cry out of happiness (R)
16. When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards him\her

Scoring:

Item responses are scored according to the following scale for positively worded items 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 13, 16. Never = 0; Rarely = 1; Sometimes = 2; Often = 3; Always = 4.

The following negatively worded items are reverse scored: 2, 4, 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15. Never = 4; Rarely = 3; Sometimes = 2; Often = 1; Always = 0.

Scores are summed to derive total for the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire. The higher the score, the higher the level of overall empathy.

¹⁷ Spreng, R. N., McKinnon, M. C., Mar, R. A., Levine, B. (2009). The Toronto Empathy Questionnaire: scale development and initial validation of a factor-analytic solution to multiple empathy measures. *J Pers Assess*, 91(1), 62-71. doi: 10.1080/00223890802484381.

Assertiveness Formative Questionnaire¹⁸

Below is a list of statements. Please read each statement carefully and rate how frequently you feel or act in the manner described. Circle your answer on the response form. There are no right or wrong answers or trick questions. Please answer each question as honestly as you can. Rate each item on a Likert-type scale from 1 (Not Very Like Me) to 5 (Very Like Me).

1. I stand up to my friends if they are doing something I don't feel comfortable doing.
2. I speak up when someone is not respecting my personal boundaries like "no cheating off my homework" or "I don't let friends borrow money."
3. I often have a hard time saying "No." (R)
4. I express my opinions, even if others disagree with me.
5. When an argument is over, I often wish I would have said what was really on my mind. (R)
6. I tend to just go along with what everyone else wants instead of stating my own thoughts. (R)
7. I sometimes avoid asking questions for fear of sounding stupid. (R)
8. I tend to bottle up my emotions rather than talk about my feelings. (R)
9. If I disagree with a person, I talk to him or her about it.
10. If a person has borrowed money (or a game, clothes, or something else of value) and is overdue in returning it, I talk to the person about it.
11. I'm usually able to tell people how I'm feeling.
12. If I don't like the way someone is being treated, I speak up about it.
13. I speak up about things I really care about.

Scoring:

Items that are framed negatively are designated with "R." They should be reversed before the final calculation (reversed score = 6 - given score).

Scores are summed to derive total for the Assertiveness Formative Questionnaire (for the negatively worded items the reversed scores should be considered). The higher the score, the higher the level of assertive behaviour.

2. OBSERVATION

The frameworks provided below could be used by educators to monitor and evaluate participants' performance.

Framework for observing empathy skills¹⁹

Based on observations across time or in specific situations, the educator rates each participant's empathic behaviours (4 empathy indicators) on 4-point scale (alternatively YES/NO option can be used). This assessment can be used at purposeful intervals to monitor the development of each participant.

¹⁸ Gaumer Erickson, A. S., Noonan, P. M., Monroe, K., & McCall, Z. (2016). Assertiveness formative questionnaire. In P. Noonan & A. Gaumer Erickson. *The skills that matter: Teaching interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies in any classroom* (p. 181–182). Corwin.

¹⁹ Empathy indicators were defined by the authors, while the assessment scale was taken from the Assertiveness Performance-Based Observation framework.

Scale:

- 1 – Beginning: Not yet able to demonstrate without scaffolding.
- 2 – Emerging: Minimal or superficial demonstration; prompting likely required.
- 3 – Proficient: Sufficient demonstration including self-appraisal and detailed, personalized application.
- 4 – Advanced: Independent and consistent demonstration; teaches/prompts others.
- 99 – Not observed: There has not been the opportunity to observe the behaviour performed by an individual participant.

Empathy indicators:

1. Demonstrates active listening skills (maintaining eye-contact, not looking around, summarizing and paraphrasing, asking for further clarifications, asking additional questions and sub-questions, not providing unsolicited advice etc.)
2. Considers another person’s perspective (point of view) during teamwork or conflict resolution
3. Provides sympathetic responses to another person’s emotions / successes / difficulties (e.g. “That must have been really hard for you.”)
4. Shares the feelings and emotions of another person

Assertiveness Performance-Based Observation Items²⁰

Based on observations across time or in specific situations, the educator rates each participant’s assertive behaviours (7 assertive indicators) on 4-point scale (alternatively YES/NO option can be used). This assessment can be used at purposeful intervals to monitor the development of each participant.

Scale:

- 1 – Beginning: Not yet able to demonstrate without scaffolding.
- 2 – Emerging: Minimal or superficial demonstration; prompting likely required.
- 3 – Proficient: Sufficient demonstration including self-appraisal and detailed, personalized application.
- 4 – Advanced: Independent and consistent demonstration; teaches/prompts others.
- 99 – Not observed: There has not been the opportunity to observe the behaviour performed by an individual participant.

Assertiveness indicators:

1. Expresses basic feelings and preferences.
2. Communicates a need or want to peers and adults in a respectful manner.
3. Demonstrates respectful refusal skills.
4. Makes assertive statements paired with body language and tone of voice that match the statement.
5. Demonstrates assertive statements during collaborative learning.

²⁰ Noonan, P. M. & Gaumer Erickson, A. S. (2018). Assertiveness Performance-Based Observation. Derived from College and Career Competency Sequence. College & Career Competency Framework. <http://cccfamework.org>

6. Determines personal boundaries and generates assertive statements to apply if boundaries are compromised.
7. Demonstrates the ability to respond to different points of view respectfully.



ACTIVITY PLANS & WORKSHEETS



Activity 1.a.1 - ACTIVE LISTENING



Objective

- To help students understand the difference between active and non-active listening.
- To develop students' active listening skills.
- To raise awareness of how active listening impacts communication and relationships.

Preparation

- Open space or chairs arranged in pairs, face-to-face.
- Area for short group discussion afterwards.
- A slide summarizing active listening behaviours (e.g., maintaining eye contact, nodding, reflecting, paraphrasing).

Step-by-step instructions

1. Introduction (5 minutes)

- **Explain the objective:** "Today, we'll explore how active listening can improve communication and relationships."
- **Key ideas to introduce:**
 - **Active listening** means fully concentrating, understanding, and responding thoughtfully to the speaker.
 - **Non-active listening** includes interrupting, judging, or thinking about your own reply while the other person speaks.
- **Warm-up**

Ask questions:

 - Have you ever talked to someone and felt they weren't really listening? How did it make you feel?

- How do you know if a person is listening to you or not? How can you tell, what are the signs?
 - Would you like to share a situation, in which someone was or wasn't properly listening to you?)
 - Write down the key characteristics of active listening on the board, while participants are speaking.
 - Define active listening, explain how it differs from non-active, non-attentive listening and summarise the key characteristics of active listening. Use the suggested slide: Active listening behaviours.
-

2. Practical Exercise – Listening Practice in Pairs (20 minutes)

Step 1: Group setup

- Divide the participants in triplets (groups of 3) and explain their roles and tasks:
 - Participant 1: the narrator, speaker,
 - Participant 2: non-active listener,
 - Participant 3: active listener.

Step 2: Active listening experience

- First, the participant 1 narrates the story to the participant 2, who should demonstrate non-active, non-attentive listening (2-3 min). Participant 3 observes the conversation from a distance.
- Next, participants 2 and 3 switch places and participant 1 continues telling the story to participant 3, who should demonstrate active listening skills (2-3 min). Participant 2 observes the conversation from a distance.
- In the next step, they switch their roles. By the end of the exercise, they all should experience the roles of the narrator, active listener and non-active listener.

Guidelines for storytelling

- Conflict or disagreement you had with your friends, siblings or parent.
- Negative experience you had which was related to social media or internet use.
- You have been asked to relocate to a new location, and you are only allowed to take a limited number of possessions (perhaps start at 10). What would you take and why?
- ...or any other topic.

Brief reflection:

- How did the narrator feel time?
-

3. Group Reflection and Discussion (10 minutes)

- As a full group, discuss:
 - "How did it feel to talk to someone who wasn't really listening?"
 - "How did it feel when someone really listened to you?"
 - "What difference did you notice in the conversation?"
 - "Which active listening behaviours made the biggest difference?"
 - Summarize key learning points:
 - Good listening makes people feel heard, respected, and valued.
 - Active listening improves mutual understanding and builds stronger connections.
-

Concluding the activity



1. Recap of key learnings

- Active listening is more than hearing words — it's about showing real interest and understanding.
- Even small behaviours (eye contact, nodding) make a big difference.

2. Personal reflection

Ask students individually:

- "What active listening habit will you try to practice more often in your daily conversations?"

3. Group sharing

Invite a few students to share:

- One situation where active listening could make a real difference (e.g., with friends, family, teachers).

4. Reinforce the takeaway

Display this message:

"Listening is not waiting for your turn to speak. It's caring enough to hear."



Optional next steps

Home assignment

Students practice active listening at home (e.g., with a family member) and reflect on what they noticed.

Active listening behaviours

- **1. Facing the speaker and making eye contact**
 - Shows you are fully present and paying attention.
- **2. Nodding occasionally**
 - Signals understanding and encouragement to continue.
- **3. Using facial expressions**
 - Smiling, raising eyebrows, or showing concern to match the tone of the conversation.
- **4. Leaning slightly forward**
 - Demonstrates interest and engagement.
- **5. Avoiding distractions**
 - Not checking your phone, looking around, or interrupting.
- **6. Giving verbal cues ("minimal encouragers")**
 - Short responses like:
 - "I see."
 - "Uh-huh."
 - "Interesting."
 - "Go on."

Active listening behaviours

- **7. Paraphrasing or summarizing**
 - Restating what the speaker said in your own words:
 - "So what you're saying is..." or "If I understand you correctly..."
- **8. Asking clarifying questions**
 - To better understand details:
 - "What did you mean by...?" or "Can you tell me more about that?"
- **9. Reflecting feelings**
 - Not just the facts, but the emotions behind them:
 - "It sounds like you're feeling frustrated." or "You seem excited about this."
- **10. Avoiding judgment**
 - Listening without immediately agreeing, disagreeing, or evaluating.
- **11. Allowing pauses**
 - Giving the speaker time to think and speak, without rushing to fill silence.
- **12. Responding appropriately**
 - Giving thoughtful feedback based on what was said.

Active listening behaviours - in short

- **Eyes on the speaker** 👁️👁️
- **Mind focused** 🧠
- **Body calm and open** 🙌
- **Words encouraging and respectful** 🗣️
- **Questions to understand, not judge** ❓



Activity 1.a.2 - WALK IN SOMEONE ELSE'S SHOES



Objective

- To develop empathy and the ability to see a situation from another person's perspective.
- To understand that different experiences lead to different feelings, thoughts, and behaviours.
- To encourage openness and understanding in communication.
- To apply specific tools for understanding others' viewpoints.

Note: The activity may be implemented as a continuation of the activity 1.a.1 (Active listening) or as a stand-alone activity. If used as a continuation of the activity 1.a.1, do refer to a method of active listening as a means of understanding others' perspective better.

Preparation

- Open space or chairs arranged for group discussions (small groups of 4–5 students).
- Printable Worksheet 1: "Walking in Someone Else's Shoes – Reflection Sheet" (one per student).
- Whiteboard or flipchart and markers.

Preparation tasks:

- Prepare a few **short scenario cards** describing different everyday situations (e.g., feeling left out, being praised publicly, moving to a new city, being misunderstood). (Suggestions provided in the attachment).
-

Step-by-step instructions

1. Introduction (5 minutes)

- **Explain the objective:** "Today we'll practice seeing the world through someone else's eyes. This helps us understand others better and communicate more kindly."
 - **Key ideas to introduce:**
 - Empathy is imagining how someone else feels.
 - Walking in someone else's shoes helps us move beyond our own perspective.
 - **Warm-up question:**
"Can you think of a time when you wished someone understood how you felt?"
 - Provide a brief explanation about what perspective-taking means:
 - Explain perspective-taking:
"Perspective-taking means imagining what another person might be thinking or feeling in a certain situation. It's about understanding the world from their point of view."
 - This is also called **cognitive empathy** – understanding someone's thoughts and feelings, not just sharing them. There's also **affective empathy**, which means you feel the same emotion.
 - Write on the board or display: **How to step into someone else's shoes:**
 - Observe body language and tone of voice.
 - Actively listen – hear their feelings, not just their words.
 - Consider their background or situation.
 - Use your imagination to picture how you'd feel in their place.
-

2. Practical Exercise – Perspective-Taking (20 minutes)

Step 1: Group setup

- Divide the participants into pairs and give each pair two copies of one problem scenario. Different scenarios are enclosed in the Attachment 1.
- Each scenario describes a situation that involves a conflict or emotional experience where two characters have different perspectives

Step 2: Role Reading and Preparation (5 minutes)

- Assign the roles based on the scenarios. One participant will start as Sam and the other as Alex. Ask participants to take a few minutes to read their role and think about how their character feels and why they might feel that way. Each student reflects on:
 - How their character **feels**
 - What their character **thinks**

- Why they might behave this way

Step 3: Role playing

- Participants act out their roles in pairs. Encourage them to express their character's feelings and thoughts clearly.
- After a few minutes, ask them to switch roles and act out the same scenario from the other character's perspective.
- While role-playing, participants should pay attention to how their perspective (understanding of the other character) changes and what new insights they gain from the role reversal.

Step 3: Pair discussion:

- After both rounds of role-playing, participants should discuss the following with their partner:
 - How does the person in the scenario probably feel?
 - What thoughts might be running through their mind?
 - How might they behave because of those feelings?
 - What could others do to make the situation better?

Step 4: Pair reflection (5 minutes)

- Pairs write a few keywords summarizing the emotions and possible helpful actions on their Worksheet 1.

3. Group Sharing and Reflection (10 minutes)

- Each group shares:
 - One feeling they identified.
 - One way to help the person in their scenario.
- Discuss with the full group:
 - What was the most challenging part of “diving into a perspective of a character”? What about switching perspectives?
 - Can you think of a time when seeing things from someone else's point of view changed how you responded to them?
 - How can understanding different perspectives help us in real-life situations?
- Summarize key learning points:
 - Everyone experiences situations differently.
 - Empathy leads to kinder actions and better dialogue.

Concluding the activity

1. Recap of key learnings

- Empathy means trying to feel what others feel.
- Perspective-taking can reduce misunderstandings and create stronger relationships.

2. Personal reflection

Ask students individually:

- "How can you show more empathy in your daily life?"

3. Group sharing

Invite a few students to share:

- A simple action they could take tomorrow to show more empathy.

4. Reinforce the takeaway

Display this message:

"You never really understand someone until you walk a mile in their shoes."



Optional next steps

Homework

Encourage the students to practice perspective-taking regularly in their interactions with friends, family, and others and to provide empathic responses (express compassion) when appropriate (e.g. "It sounds like you had a really tough day, and you're feeling really stressed out.").

Learning Unit: Communication

Activity 1a2 - Walking in someone else's shoes

Worksheet - to be printed.

Imagine how the person feels, thinks, and acts. Write your reflections below.

Section	Reflection
Scenario (What happened?)	
Feelings (What might the person feel?)	
Thoughts (What might the person think?)	
Actions (What could you do to help?)	



This material has been developed within the Erasmus+ project ASAP - A Systemic APproach to social media and pre-adolescents through thinking skills education



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SCENARIO 1: PRIVACY CONCERNS

Characters: Emma (the child) and Emma's Mom

Emma: Emma loves posting pictures and updates on social media to share her life with her friends. She believes she has the right to share what she wants online.

Emma's Mom: Emma's mom is concerned about Emma's privacy and safety. She worries that sharing too much personal information online could lead to unwanted attention or cyberbullying.

Situation: Emma posts a picture of herself and her friends at a sleepover. Emma's mom sees the post and asks her to take it down, fearing it reveals too much about their home and their routines.

Possible arguments from Emma's mother:

- The published information could be used against us and cause harm.
- Once you post something online, you lose control over how that information will be used and shared.

SCENARIO 2: SCREEN TIME LIMITS

Characters: Jake (the child) and Jake's Dad

Jake: Jake enjoys playing online games and chatting with friends on social media. He feels that these activities help him relax and stay connected with his friends.

Jake's Dad: Jake's dad is worried that Jake is spending too much time on his devices, which might affect his homework, sleep, and real-life social interactions.

Situation: Jake's dad sets a rule that all devices must be turned off by 9 PM. Jake disagrees, arguing that he needs to stay online to maintain his social connections and finish his game.

Possible arguments from Jake's dad:

- Spending too much time on screens can negatively affect health.
- Setting boundaries helps with better organization and ensures that school responsibilities are completed on time.

SCENARIO 3: ONLINE FRIENDS

Characters: Mia (the child) and Mia's Dad

Mia: Mia has made a new friend online who shares her interests in art and music. She enjoys chatting with this friend and feels understood and supported.

Mia's Dad: Mia's dad is concerned about Mia forming close relationships with people she has never met in real life. He worries about the risks of online predators and the authenticity of online identities.

Situation: Mia wants to meet her online friend in person at a public event. Her dad is very hesitant and suggests that Mia should stop communicating with this friend altogether.

Possible arguments from Mia's dad:

- It's very difficult to verify if this person is who they say they are.
- Online relationships don't give us the same emotional cues or ability to build trust like real-life relationships.

SCENARIO 4: CYBERBULLYING

Characters: Lucas (the child) and Lucas's Mom

Lucas: Lucas has been receiving mean comments and messages from a group of classmates on social media. He feels hurt and embarrassed but doesn't want to tell his mom because he fears she will overreact.

Lucas's mom: Lucas's mom notices that Lucas seems withdrawn and sad. She is worried about his behaviour and suspects something is wrong, but Lucas keeps insisting everything is fine.

Situation: Lucas's mom checks his social media accounts without his permission and finds the bullying messages. She confronts Lucas about what she found and suggests talking to the school about it.

Possible arguments from Lucas' mom:

- Ignoring the problem won't make it go away—it's important to take action so it doesn't get worse.
- Bullying, especially online, can make you feel isolated, hurt, and embarrassed, but you don't have to go through this alone.

SCENARIO 5: SOCIAL MEDIA CHALLENGES

Characters: Zoe (the child) and Zoe's Mom

Zoe: Zoe loves participating in social media challenges and trends. She thinks they are fun and a good way to get likes and followers.

Zoe's Mom: Zoe's mom is worried about the risks associated with some social media challenges. She is concerned about peer pressure and the potential for dangerous behaviour.

Situation: Zoe participates in a risky social media challenge and posts a video of it. Her mom sees the video and tells Zoe to take it down immediately, explaining the potential dangers.

Possible arguments from Zoe's mom:

- Many of these challenges encourage risky behavior just to get likes or attention, but it's not worth risking your health or getting injured.
- It's important to learn how to set boundaries and think critically about what's safe to participate in, even if everyone else is doing it.



Activity 2.a.1 - EXPLORING DIFFERENT BEHAVIOURAL RESPONSES TO CHALLENGING SITUATIONS



Objective

- To help students understand the differences between passive, aggressive, and assertive communication styles.
- To recognize the consequences of different response styles.
- To lay the foundation for developing assertive behaviour.

Preparation

- Tables arranged for small group collaboration (3–5 students per group).
- Whiteboard or flipchart for discussion summaries.
- Printable Worksheet 1: "Response Styles – Observation Sheet" (one per group or student).
- Slide or poster summarizing Passive, Aggressive, and Assertive behaviours.
- Markers or pens.
- Prepare short examples of challenging situations (optional: ready for groups to use).
- Prepare a summary of the three response styles for display.

Step-by-step instructions

1. Introduction (5 minutes)

- **Explain the objective:** "Today we'll learn about different ways people respond in challenging situations — and why assertive responses are often the healthiest and most effective."
- **Key ideas to introduce:**
 - **Passive:** Not standing up for yourself, letting others violate your rights.

- **Aggressive:** Standing up for yourself but violating others' rights.
 - **Assertive:** Standing up for yourself respectfully without hurting others.
 - **Warm-up question:**
"Have you ever seen someone react too passively or too aggressively in a difficult situation?"
 - **Explain**
"Everyone reacts differently in tough situations because we all have different past experiences, beliefs, and personalities. But we always have a choice in how we respond."
Teacher note:
"Assertive behaviour is ideal in many situations, but not every moment needs a strong reaction. Sometimes it's okay to stay quiet on purpose. The key is knowing you had a choice."
-

2. Practical Exercise – Understanding Response Styles (20 minutes)

Step 1: Group setup

- Divide students into small groups (3–5 participants).
- Distribute Worksheet 1 to each group.

Step 2: Group work (15 minutes)

- Present a few **challenging situations** (display the suggested slide or this can be brainstormed by students). Also, students can use random situations from their everyday life.
 - Each group discusses and completes for each situation:
 - How a **Passive** person would act or react.
 - How an **Aggressive** person would act or react.
 - How an **Assertive** person would act or react.
 - Groups write down their ideas on Worksheet 1.
-

3. Group Sharing and Discussion (10 minutes)

- Invite each group to share:
 - One situation and the different responses they described.
- After completing the table, invite each group to also discuss:
 - "How might each response style affect your relationships over time?"
- Discuss as a full class:
 - Which response style do you think is the most helpful in the long run?
 - Why might some people react passively or aggressively instead of assertively?
 - How can assertive communication help in solving conflicts?

- Which response (communication) style do you think you use most often, and why?
 - Would you say it is easy or difficult to respond (communicate) in an assertive way? Why?
 - After learning about these response (communication) styles, what changes would you like to make in how you communicate with others (if any)?
 - How do you think each communication style affects your relationships with friends, family, or teachers?
 - *Do you think people sometimes respond with anger (aggression) because they feel afraid or insecure? (This helps frame aggression as a sign of vulnerability, not just "bad behaviour.")*
 - Summarize key learning points:
 - Assertive communication respects both yourself and others.
 - Different responses create very different outcomes.
-

Concluding the activity

1. Recap of key learnings

- Passive responses often leave problems unsolved.
- Aggressive responses often create new conflicts.
- Assertive responses help solve problems respectfully and effectively.

2. Personal reflection

Ask students individually:

- "What kind of response do you tend to use most often? How could you be more assertive?"

3. Group sharing

Invite a few students to share:

- One small change they could make to respond more assertively in everyday situations.

4. Reinforce the takeaway

Display this message:

"Speak up for yourself — but do it with respect for others."



Optional next steps

Home assignment

Students observe real-life situations during the week and note examples of passive, aggressive, and assertive behaviours they notice around them.

Learning Unit: Communication**Activity 2a1 - Exploring different behavioral responses****Worksheet 1 - to be printed****Task:**

The table below lists different life situations and responses to them. For each situation, mark with an X which type of behaviour it involves.

SITUATION	RESPONSE OF A STUDENT IN THAT SITUATION	PASSIVE BEHAVIOR	ASSERTIVE BEHAVIOR	AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR
Jake sees a nasty comment on his picture.	Jake responds with an even meaner comment to the bully.			
Sophie is left out of a group chat.	She feels sad but doesn't talk to anyone about it.			
Grace receives an inappropriate message with explicit sexual content from a stranger.	She responds with threatening language.			
Ava is asked by an online friend to share her phone number in a chat.	She politely declines and explains why she keeps such information private.			
David sees a false rumour about his friend online.	He corrects the information publicly but respectfully and supports his friend by reporting the post.			
Ryan's friend shares an embarrassing photo of him online.	Ryan feels upset but doesn't ask his friend to take it down.			
Lily gets an unwanted friend request.	She responds with a rude message telling the person to leave her alone.			
A group of girls in a group chat is talking about a classmate who isn't there and gossiping about her.	Ana speaks up and shares her opinion about the classmate, even though it's different from the others' opinions.			
Oliver feels pressured to join a risky online challenge because all his friends are doing it.	He participates even though he feels uneasy.			

Learning Unit: Communication

Activity 2a1 - Exploring different behavioral responses

Worksheet 1 - correct answers - to be displayed

SITUATION	RESPONSE OF A STUDENT IN THAT SITUATION	PASSIVE BEHAVIOR	ASSERTIVE BEHAVIOR	AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR
Jake sees a nasty comment on his picture.	Jake responds with an even meaner comment to the bully.			X
Sophie is left out of a group chat.	She feels sad but doesn't talk to anyone about it.	X		
Grace receives an inappropriate message with explicit sexual content from a stranger.	She responds with threatening language.			X
Ava is asked by an online friend to share her phone number in a chat.	She politely declines and explains why she keeps such information private.		X	
David sees a false rumour about his friend online.	He corrects the information publicly but respectfully and supports his friend by reporting the post.		X	
Ryan's friend shares an embarrassing photo of him online.	Ryan feels upset but doesn't ask his friend to take it down.	X		
Lily gets an unwanted friend request.	She responds with a rude message telling the person to leave her alone.			X
A group of girls in a group chat is talking about a classmate who isn't there and gossiping about her.	Ana speaks up and shares her opinion about the classmate, even though it's different from the others' opinions.		X	
Oliver feels pressured to join a risky online challenge because all his friends are doing it.	He participates even though he feels uneasy.	X		

Learning Unit: Communication
Activity 2a1 - Exploring different behavioral responses
Worksheet 2 - to be printed

Task:
For the previous examples, where individuals behaved passively or aggressively, determine what would be a more appropriate, assertive way of behaving

SITUATIONS WITH PASSIVE AND AGGRESSIVE RESPONSE (copy the situations)	ASSERTIVE RESPONSE
Jake sees a nasty comment on his picture.	
Sophie is left out of a group chat.	
Grace receives an inappropriate message with explicit sexual content from a stranger.	
Ryan's friend shares an embarrassing photo of him online.	
Lily gets an unwanted friend request.	
Oliver feels pressured to join a risky online challenge because all his friends are doing it.	

Learning Unit: Communication

Activity 2a1 - Exploring different behavioral responses

Worksheet 2 - correct answers - to be displayed

Situation	ASSERTIVE RESPONSE
Jake sees a nasty comment on his picture.	Jake writes a respectful reply to the nasty comment, stating that such behaviour is not acceptable and asking the commenter to stop. Jake talks to a trusted adult, such as a parent or teacher, about the situation and asks for advice on how to handle it appropriately.
Sophie is left out of a group chat.	Sophie asks the group directly if she can be added to the chat, explaining that she values being part of their conversations and activities. Sophie privately messages one of the group members, calmly expressing that she feels left out and would like to understand why she wasn't included.
Grace receives an inappropriate message with explicit sexual content from a stranger.	Grace calmly replies to the sender, stating that the message is inappropriate and asking them to stop sending such messages. Grace talks to a parent, teacher, or another trusted adult about the inappropriate message and asks for their advice and support. Grace reports the inappropriate message to the platform or app administrators for violating their terms of service.
Ryan's friend shares an embarrassing photo of him online.	Ryan calmly tells his friend in person or through a message that he is embarrassed by the photo and would appreciate if it could be removed. Ryan suggests that his friend share a different photo that is less embarrassing or one that Ryan approves of. If his friend does not respond positively, Ryan seeks help from a trusted adult or teacher to mediate the situation and get the photo removed.
Lily gets an unwanted friend request.	Lily adjusts her privacy settings on social media to limit who can send her friend requests, ensuring that only people she knows can contact her. Lily directly communicates with the person who sent the request, politely explaining that she doesn't accept friend requests from strangers. If the request seems suspicious or inappropriate, Lily blocks the sender and reports the account to the platform for review.
Oliver feels pressured to join a risky online challenge because all his friends are doing it.	Oliver calmly tells his friends that he does not want to participate in the challenge, explaining his reasons and standing by his decision. Oliver suggests an alternative activity or challenge that is safe and fun, proposing a different way for everyone to enjoy themselves together.

Learning Unit: Communication

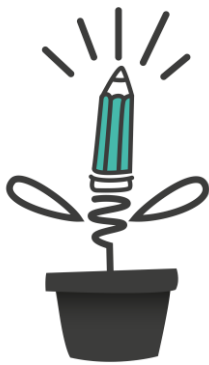
Activity 2a1 - Exploring different behavioral responses

To be displayed

**Speak up for yourself — but do it
with respect for others.**



Activity 2.a.2 - RECOGNISING RESPONSE STYLES AND ANTICIPATING ALTERNATIVE RESPONSES



Objective

- To help students recognize passive, aggressive, and assertive responses in everyday situations.
- To develop students' ability to propose assertive alternatives to passive or aggressive behaviour.
- To strengthen critical thinking and self-awareness in communication.

Preparation

- Tables arranged for small group collaboration (3–5 students per group).
- Whiteboard or flipchart for group presentations.
- Printable Worksheet 1: "Recognising and Improving Responses" (one per group or student).
- Set of challenging situations – on cards.
- Slide or poster summarizing the three response styles.
- Markers or pens.

Step-by-step instructions

1. Introduction (5 minutes)

- **Explain the objective:** "Today we'll practice recognizing different communication styles and think about how to replace unhelpful responses with assertive ones."
- **Key ideas to introduce:**
 - Recognizing behaviour is the first step toward changing it.
 - There is almost always a way to respond assertively, even in tough situations.

- **Warm-up question:**
"Why do you think people sometimes react aggressively or passively instead of assertively?"
-

2. Practical Exercise – Response Recognition and Alternatives (20 minutes)

Step 1: Group setup

- Divide students into small groups (3–5 participants).
- Distribute Worksheet 1 (for each group) and Worksheet 2 (for each participant) and one or more challenging situations per group – cut them out from the template attached.

Step 2: Group work (15 minutes)

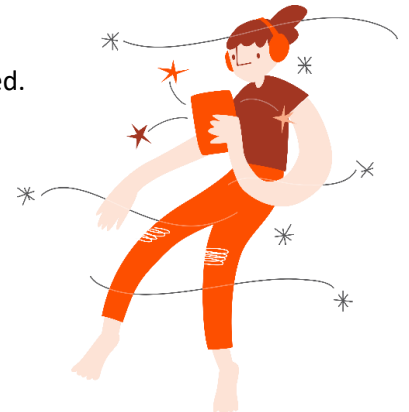
- For each situation, students:
 - Describe a typical **Passive** response.
 - Describe a typical **Aggressive** response.
 - Suggest an **Assertive** alternative.

Step 3: Individual work (15 minutes)

- Each participant individually decides which response style was used in a particular situation and propose alternative assertive responses in situations with passive or aggressive response styles (10 min).
 - Encourage students to think creatively but realistically.
-

3. Group Sharing and Discussion (10 minutes)

- Invite each group to present:
 - One situation and the three types of responses they discussed.
- Discuss with the full class:
 - "Which response feels most natural to you personally?"
 - "Which response would likely solve the problem best?"
 - "How does assertiveness help everyone involved?"
- Summarize key learning points:
 - Assertive behaviour respects both yourself and others.
 - You can prepare for difficult situations by thinking ahead about assertive ways to respond.



Concluding the activity

1. Recap of key learnings

- Recognizing communication styles helps you respond more wisely.
- Assertive alternatives lead to better outcomes for everyone.

2. Personal reflection

Ask students individually:

- "Think of a situation you often face. How could you respond more assertively next time?"

3. Group sharing

Invite a few students to share:

- One assertive sentence they could use in a challenging situation.

4. Reinforce the takeaway

Display this message:

"You can't control others' behaviour — but you can control how you respond."



Optional next steps

Home assignment

Students write a short dialogue showing a passive, aggressive, and assertive response to the same situation.

Recognising and Improving Responses

Passive Response

Aggressive Response

Assertive Response

fff

fff

fff

Summary of response styles

Passive Response

- Avoids expressing feelings, thoughts, or needs.
- Puts others' needs above own needs.
- Often leads to frustration, resentment, and being overlooked.

👉 Key words:
Stay silent, give in, ignore own feelings.

Aggressive Response

- Expresses feelings and needs in a hostile or disrespectful way.
- Violates the rights of others.
- Often leads to conflict, fear, or damaged relationships.

👉 Key words:
Shout, blame, threaten, dominate.

Assertive Response

- Expresses feelings and needs clearly, confidently, and respectfully.
- Balances self-respect with respect for others.
- Builds mutual understanding and positive relationships.

👉 Key words:
Speak up, be clear, stay calm, respect others.

Challenging situations

- **Someone cuts in front of you in the lunch line.**
- **A classmate repeatedly interrupts you while you're speaking during group work.**
- **Your friend borrows your favorite book and returns it damaged without apologizing.**
- **You are assigned a group project, but one teammate refuses to contribute.**
- **A stranger posts an embarrassing comment about your photo online.**
- **A neighbor's dog keeps running into your garden and destroying your plants.**
- **Your parents make weekend plans for you without asking if you're available.**
- **Your sibling wears your clothes without permission and denies it.**

Learning Unit: Communication

Activity 2a2 - Recognising response styles

To be printed and cut

Someone cuts in front of you in the lunch line.

A classmate repeatedly interrupts you while you're speaking during group work.

Your friend borrows your favorite book and returns it damaged without apologizing.

You are assigned a group project, but one teammate refuses to contribute.

A stranger posts an embarrassing comment about your photo online.

A neighbor's dog keeps running into your garden and destroying your plants.

Your parents make weekend plans for you without asking if you're available.

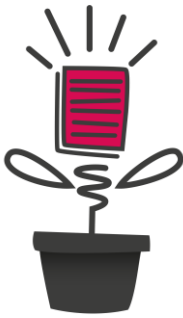
Your sibling wears your clothes without permission and denies it.

You gets an unwanted friend request.

**You can't control others' behavior
— but you can control how you
respond.**



Activity 2.b.1 - I-MESSAGES



Objective

- To teach students how to communicate assertively using "I-messages."
- To help students express their feelings, needs, and requests clearly and respectfully.
- To prevent conflicts and misunderstandings by focusing on personal experience rather than blaming others.

Preparation

Space configuration:

- Traditional classroom or small group seating (3–5 students per group).
- Space for pair practice later.
- Printable Worksheet 1: "Creating I-Messages" (one per student).
- Markers or pens.
- A slide or handout showing the structure of an I-message:
 - **I feel...** (state emotion)
 - **When...** (describe behaviour without blame)
 - **Because...** (explain why it affects you)
 - **I would like...** (state your request or need)

Step-by-step instructions

1. Introduction (5 minutes)

- **Explain the objective:** "Today we'll learn a simple but powerful way to express ourselves called an 'I-message.' It helps you say what you feel and need without attacking others."
- **Key ideas to introduce:**
 - **I-messages** focus on your own feelings and experiences.

- **You-messages** (e.g., "You never listen!") often make others feel attacked and cause conflict.
- Using I-messages, we clearly stand up for ourselves while also expressing our feelings. Feelings are our own, and we are responsible for them (e.g., "I am angry" instead of "You are making me angry").
- Using I-messages, we tell the other person how we feel in a specific situation, summarize the problem, and express our expectations or suggest a solution. Such statements do not include criticism, judgment, or attacks on the other person, thereby reducing the likelihood of interpersonal conflicts.
- Example: Sam's older sister often calls him "little one", which bothers him. One day, he had enough and responded by saying, "You're a rude goat, I don't like you!". This response hurt his sister, increased the conflict between them, and made Sam feel bad as well. A more appropriate response would be to use an I-message: "I don't like it and I feel hurt when you call me 'little one.' I would like you to stop calling me that."
- **Warm-up question:**
"Have you ever been blamed for something and immediately felt defensive? How did it affect the conversation?"

2. Practical Exercise – Building I-Messages (20 minutes)

Step 1: Group setup

- Distribute Worksheet 1 to each student.

Step 2: Learning the structure (5 minutes)

- Show the standard I-message format (slide in the attachment)
- Show the difference between I message and You-message (slide in the attachment).

I feel (emotion) **when** (describe behaviour) **because** (impact) **and I would like** (request).

- Example:

"I feel frustrated when you interrupt me because I lose my train of thought, and I would like you to let me finish speaking."

Step 3: Individual work (10 minutes)

- In the worksheet, there are a few situations in which adolescents experience a problem or conflict. Find and write down the best way to respond using an I-message.

Step 4: Pair sharing (5 minutes)

- Students pair up and read one of their I-messages aloud to each other.
- Partners give positive feedback on clarity and tone.

3. Group Reflection and Discussion (10 minutes)

- As a full group, discuss:
 - "How did using an I-message feel compared to blaming or criticizing?"

- "Why do you think I-messages help prevent arguments?"
 - "What makes an I-message powerful?"
 - Summarize key learning points:
 - I-messages help express feelings and needs without starting fights.
 - Good communication starts with taking responsibility for your own feelings.
-

Concluding the activity

1. Recap of key learnings

- I-messages communicate emotions and needs respectfully.
- I-messages reduce defensiveness and open the door to better solutions.

2. Personal reflection

Ask students individually:

- "When could you use an I-message in your daily life?"

3. Group sharing

Invite a few students to share:

- One real-life situation where they could use an I-message this week.

4. Reinforce the takeaway

Display this message:

"Say what you feel, without making others feel bad."



Optional next steps

Home assignment

Students practice creating I-messages at home and reflect on how others responded.

You message vs. I-message

You never help with the chores around the house!

I feel overwhelmed with all the chores and would really appreciate it if we could share the responsibilities more evenly.

You always interrupt me when I'm talking. It's so rude!

I feel frustrated when I'm interrupted while speaking because it makes me feel like my thoughts aren't valued. I would appreciate it if you could let me finish before you respond.

You're so disorganized! Why can't you ever get anything right?

I feel stressed when things are disorganized because it makes it hard for me to find what I need. It would be helpful if we could work on being more organized.

You never keep your promises. You're so unreliable!

I feel let down when promises aren't kept because it affects my trust. It would mean a lot to me if we could both try to follow through on our commitments.

Structure of I-message

- **I feel... (state emotion)**
- **When... (describe behavior without blame)**
- **Because... (explain why it affects you)**
- **I would like... (state your request or need)**



Learning Unit: Communication

Activity 2b1 - I-message

Worksheet 1 - to be printed out

Task:

Find and write down the best way to respond using an "I-message."

Anej and Jon are classmates. Anej keeps posting embarrassing comments in a class group chat making fun of Jon. One day Jon has had enough of it, and he says assertively to Anej:

Jack and his three close friends (Smith, Jacob and Robert) often spend time together, both online and in-person after school. One day Jack discovers his three friends are playing online games without inviting him, causing him to feel left out. He says to them:

Mia and Sally are best friends. One day Mia discovers that Sally forwarded a few of Mia's messages to Ann, disclosing Mia's personal information without consent. Mia feels angry and disappointed and says assertively to Sally:

Simon and his dad Ben have an agreement that Ben only checks Simon's smartphone with his permission (when they agree in advance). Simon accidentally discovers that Ben has been checking on his phone without requesting the permission to do it. Simon says to his dad Ben:

Lucy accidentally stumbles upon inappropriate (sexual) content online. This is later discovered by Lucy's mom, who gets upset and threatens Lucy to take her phone away as she was obviously very receptive to online threats. Lucy assertively responds to her mom:

Learning Unit: Communication

Activity 2b1 - I-message

ANSWERS to the exercise

- "Anej, I feel hurt and embarrassed when you make fun of me in the group chat. I want you to stop posting those comments and treat me with respect."

- "Anej, I don't appreciate the embarrassing comments you keep posting about me. They make me feel bad. Please stop and respect my feelings."

- "Smith, Jacob, Robert, I feel left out when you play online games without inviting me. I really enjoy spending time with you all and would like to be included next time."

- "I've noticed that you've been playing online games without me, and it makes me feel like I'm not part of the group. I would really like to join you, so please let me know when you're playing."

- "Sally, I feel really hurt and disappointed that you forwarded my personal messages to Ann without asking me first. I need you to respect my privacy and not share my messages without my permission."

- "Sally, I'm upset because you shared my private messages with Ann. It's important to me that you ask before sharing anything personal, so please respect my boundaries in the future."

- "Dad, I noticed that you accessed my phone without my prior approval. I feel upset because we had an agreement about this. Can we talk about why this happened and how we can follow our agreement going forward?"

- "I feel disappointed that you looked at my phone without my consent, even though we agreed otherwise. Please make sure to follow our agreement and ask before checking my phone."

- "I'm sorry that I accidentally saw something inappropriate, and I understand why you're concerned. Instead of taking my phone away, can we discuss ways to improve my internet safety and how I can be more cautious online?"

- "Mom, I didn't intentionally look for inappropriate content, and I feel upset about the situation. I'd appreciate it if we could find a solution together, like setting up filters or discussing how to handle such incidents, rather than taking my phone away."

Learning Unit: Communication

Activity 2b1 - I-message

To be printed and cut (or just presented) - Challenging situation - for optional exercise

Someone cuts in front of you in the lunch line.

A classmate repeatedly interrupts you while you're speaking during group work.

Your friend borrows your favorite book and returns it damaged without apologizing.

You are assigned a group project, but one teammate refuses to contribute.

A stranger posts an embarrassing comment about your photo online.

A neighbor's dog keeps running into your garden and destroying your plants.

Your parents make weekend plans for you without asking if you're available.

Your sibling wears your clothes without permission and denies it.

You gets an unwanted friend request.

Learning Unit: Communication

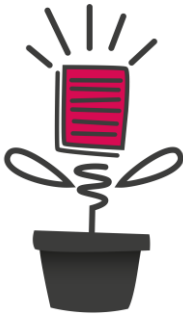
Activity 2b1 - I-messages

Slide - to present

**Say what you feel,
without making others feel bad.**



Activity 2.b.2 - ROLE PLAY: COMMUNICATION STYLES IN ACTION



Objective

- To help students practice recognizing and using passive, aggressive, and assertive communication styles.
- To build confidence in applying assertive communication in real-life situations.
- To reflect on the impact different communication styles have on others.

Preparation

- Open space for role-play (pairs or small groups).
- Chairs arranged for audience seating during performance (optional).
- Printable Worksheet 1: "Role Play Reflection Sheet" (one per student or group).
- Markers or pens.
- Prepare 6–8 **Role Play Cards** describing short challenging situation

Step-by-step instructions

1. Introduction (5 minutes)

- **Explain the objective:** "Today we'll act out different communication styles — passive, aggressive, and assertive — and see how each one feels in real conversations."
- **Key ideas to introduce:**
 - Practicing communication styles helps you recognize them more easily in real life.
 - Role-play helps prepare you to choose an assertive response when it matters.
- **Warm-up question:**
"Have you ever watched two people solve a conflict differently? What worked better?"

2. Practical Exercise – Role Play (20 minutes)

Step 1: Group setup

- Divide students into groups of four.
- Distribute the Worksheet 1 to each student.
- Inform the participants that the worksheet lists four situations or events from everyday life.

Step 2: Exercise (15 minutes)

- First, each participant individually reads the worksheet and prepares three possible responses (passive, assertive, aggressive) for each situation (10 min).
- Then, within their group, they act out or demonstrate the prepared responses, considering both verbal and non-verbal aspects of expression. In case of assertive responses, they pay attention to the use of "I-messages." They should ensure that they take turns in different roles among themselves. Each of them will therefore be in the role of the narrator in one example, demonstrator of passive response in another, demonstrator of aggressive response in the third, and demonstrator of assertive response in the fourth. When demonstrating different responses, the participants should use the examples they have prepared in the individual part of this exercise. For each problem situation, the participants should discuss the demonstrated responses (e.g. "Were the responses aligned with the characteristics of the corresponding response styles?") (15 min)

3. Group Reflection and Discussion (10 minutes)

- After each group finishes, invite a short discussion:
 - How did you like the activity? Did this exercise help you better understand the differences across the response styles?
 - How did you feel when you used passive, aggressive and assertive ways to respond to a given situation? Did you notice any difference? In which case did you feel the best (the most confident)?
 - Which response style do you consider most effective in solving a given problem situation? Why?
- Summarize key learning points:
 - Assertiveness balances self-respect and respect for others.
 - Practicing different styles helps you choose the best one when it matters.

Concluding the activity

1. Recap of key learnings

- When behaving assertively we normally feel good about ourselves because we managed to stand up for our rights and for what we believe in.
- Learning assertive behaviour significantly contributes to the awareness of one's own rights and needs, as well as to self-confidence – the understanding that we are allowed, capable, and able to act in accordance with what we feel, think, and want.
- When we behave assertively, we stand up for ourselves while also trying to understand the other person's position, empathize with them, accept them, and respect them. Assertiveness always relates to interpersonal interactions and relationships with other people.
- It is very important to consider reality when behaving assertively. It must be based on making responsible decisions about the type of behaviour we will choose in a specific situation, under given circumstances, and according to realistic possibilities.

2. Personal reflection

Ask students individually:

- "Which style do you find easiest to use? Which one is hardest?"

3. Group sharing

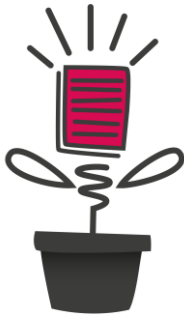
Invite a few students to share:

- A real-life situation where they would like to respond more assertively next time.

4. Reinforce the takeaway

Display this message:

"Practice makes powerful — choose assertiveness!"



Optional next steps

Creative homework

Students write a short dialogue showing passive, aggressive, and assertive responses to a situation of their choice.

Learning Unit: Communication
Activity 2b2 - Communication styles
To be printed

Task:
Here are four situations or events from everyday life. For each one, find examples of three possible responses (passive, aggressive, assertive) and write them down.

SITUATION 1: A classmate writes lies about you on social media.

Passive behaviour _____

Aggressive behaviour _____

Assertive behaviour _____

SITUATION 2: You want to join your friends in a closed chat-group for which you haven't received notification.

Passive behaviour _____

Aggressive behaviour _____

Assertive behaviour _____

SITUATION 3: A classmate is urging you to explore inappropriate sexual content on the Internet together, although he/she knows you are not allowed to do it. You do not want to do this.

Passive behaviour _____

Aggressive behaviour _____

Assertive behaviour _____

SITUATION 4: A classmate shares an embarrassing photo of you on social media without your consent

Passive behaviour _____

Aggressive behaviour _____

Assertive behaviour _____

Task:
Reflect on how it felt to act passively, aggressively, and assertively.
Which response style felt most natural to you?

Communication styles

**Passive Response
Feelings**

**Aggressive Response
Feelings**

**Assertive Response
Feelings**

fff

fff

fff

Learning Unit: Communication

Activity 2b2 - Communication styles

To be printed and cut (or just presented) - Challenging situation - optional activity

Someone cuts in front of you in the lunch line.

A classmate repeatedly interrupts you while you're speaking during group work.

Your friend borrows your favorite book and returns it damaged without apologizing.

You are assigned a group project, but one teammate refuses to contribute.

A stranger posts an embarrassing comment about your photo online.

A neighbor's dog keeps running into your garden and destroying your plants.

Your parents make weekend plans for you without asking if you're available.

Your sibling wears your clothes without permission and denies it.

You gets an unwanted friend request.

Learning Unit: Communication

Activity 2b2 - Communication styles

To be presented

**Practice makes powerful
— choose assertiveness!**



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