

# What is Passive Aggressive Behavior?

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Passive aggressive Behavior takes many forms but can generally be described as a non-verbal aggression that manifests in negative behavior. It is where you are angry with someone but do not or cannot tell them. Instead of communicating honestly when you feel upset, annoyed, irritated or disappointed you may instead bottle the feelings up, shut off verbally, give angry looks, make obvious changes in Behavior, be obstructive, sulky or put up a stone wall. It may also involve indirectly resisting requests from others by evading or creating confusion around the issue. Not going along with things. It can either be covert (concealed and hidden) or overt (blatant and obvious).

A passive aggressive might not always show that they are angry or resentful. They might appear in agreement, polite, friendly, down-to-earth, kind and well-meaning. However, underneath there may be manipulation going on - hence the term "Passive-Aggressive."

Passive aggression is a destructive pattern of behavior that can be seen as a form of emotional abuse in relationships that bites away at trust between people. It happens when negative emotions and feelings build up and are then held in on a self-imposed need for either acceptance by another, dependence on others or to avoid even further arguments or conflict.

If some of this is sounding familiar, don't worry. We all do some of the above from time to time. It doesn't make us passive aggressive necessarily nor does it mean your partner is. Passive aggression is when the behavior is more persistent and repeats periodically, where there are ongoing patterns of negative attitudes and passive resistance in personal relationships or work situations.

Some examples of passive aggression might be:

- Non-Communication when there is clearly something problematic to discuss
- Avoiding/Ignoring when you are so angry that you feel you cannot speak calmly
- Evading problems and issues, burying an angry head in the sand
- Procrastinating: Intentionally putting off important tasks for less important ones
- Obstructing: Deliberately stalling or preventing an event or process of change
- Fear of Competition: Avoiding situations where one party will be seen as better at something
- Ambiguity: Being cryptic, unclear, not fully engaging in conversations
- Sulking: Being silent, morose, sullen and resentful in order to get attention or sympathy.
- Chronic Lateness: A way to put you in control over others and their expectations
- Chronic Forgetting: Shows a blatant disrespect and disregard for others to punish in some way
- Fear of Intimacy: Often there can be trust issues with passive aggressive people and guarding against becoming too intimately involved or attached will be a way for them to feel in control of the relationship
- Making Excuses: Always coming up with reasons for not doing things
- Victimization: Unable to look at their own part in a situation will turn the tables to become the victim and will behave like one
- Self-Pity: The 'poor me' scenario

- ❑ Blaming others for situations rather than being able to take responsibility for your own actions or being able to take an objective view of the situation as a whole.
- ❑ Withholding usual behaviors or roles: For example sex, cooking and cleaning or making cups of tea, running a bath etc. all to reinforce an already unclear message to the other party
- ❑ Learned Helplessness where a person continually acts like they can't help themselves – deliberately doing a poor job of something for which they are often explicitly responsible

Passive aggression might be seen as a defense mechanism that people use to protect themselves. It might be automatic and might stem from early experiences. What they are protecting themselves from will be unique and individual to each person; although might include underlying feelings of rejection, fear, mistrust, insecurity and/or low self-esteem.

Patterns of unassertive and passive behavior may have been learnt in childhood as a coping strategy possibly as a response to parents who may have been too controlling or not allowing their child to express their thoughts and feelings freely. To cope, a child might adopt a passive-aggressive behavior pattern. If a child was ridiculed, put down or punished for openly expressing their feelings or disagreeing with their parents the child would learn to substitute open expression for passive resistance - agreeing with what Mom or Dad said in order to be a “good child” or not speaking out honestly or at all. If there was a consistent pattern within the family of punishment or rejection for asserting themselves the child would learn to become highly skilled at passively rebelling. Examples of a child rebelling might be toilet training, withdrawing from family conversation, choosing subjects at school to please parents and then not working hard, and being picky at mealtimes . These behaviors cause worry and upset to the parents who may have no idea their behavior is contributing to the problem.

### **Passive Aggression in the Workplace**

In the workplace a passive-aggressive employee or employer may use these techniques as a form of control and/or intimidation. The worker might sulk, make faces, scowl inwardly when given jobs to do or may agree politely and then take ages to do them. By doing so, he they are showing annoyance in the hope they will not be asked to do those tasks again. Employers can also use passive aggression when confronted with employee problems, turning a blind eye, not facing facts or dealing with genuine cases of bullying and intimidation. This avoidant behavior can be very damaging to individuals and teams of individuals within organizations.

### **Consequences of Passive Aggressive Behavior**

In being passive aggressive you are not giving yourself or others an opportunity to listen to what you think or feel. When on the receiving end of passive aggression, you can feel confused, upset, offended, guilty and frustrated. You may think you've done something wrong, but have no clear idea what it was.

It avoids communication in a very negative way. It creates insecurity in all parties. It creates a bad atmosphere between people. It is a form of conflict where either both or

one party cannot engage sensibly in the issues. It avoids the real issues. It creates negative feelings and resentments in an unassertive way.

**Five tips for overcoming your own passive-aggressive Behaviors:**

1. Become aware of the underlying feelings causing your Behavior
2. Become aware of the impacts of your Behavior and how your desire to defeat others, get back at them or annoy them creates yet further uncomfortable feelings for yourself
3. Take responsibility for your actions and reactions
4. Try to not feel attacked when faced with a problem but instead take an overall objective view of the situation
5. Learn to be assertive in expressing yourself. You have a right to your thoughts and feelings so communicate them with honesty and truth and strengthen your relationships

**Five tips for coping with the passive-aggressive Behavior of others:**

1. Become aware of how passive aggression operates and try to be understanding towards your partner
2. Explain to your partner how their Behavior towards you is affecting you. Communicate calmly without blaming – i.e. talk about how you feel and what you think without using language that will enflame the situation more. For example you might say “I feel upset by your Behavior” rather than “you’ve done this or that”.
3. Be aware of your responses to others and yourself– do not blame yourself for the Behavior and reaction of others
4. Be honest about your part in the situation
5. If the aggressive behavior of others continues to affect you in a negative way, set clear boundaries around yourself – rules for what you will and won’t accept. Stay strong and focused and get on with your life in a positive way.