

Dealing with Passive Aggression

Name

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Psychoterapist Andrea Harn defines passive aggression as “a non-verbal aggression that manifests in negative behavior” (Harn, 2011). In other words, if a person is angry with someone else, but cannot tell that openly, he or she changes the behavior to show signs of discontent being experienced at the moment. Such a person cannot always show the discontent openly, but rather agree with you, and use some way of manipulating you afterwards.

There are signs that can show us the person is afraid or not willing to cause conflict, but is upset with what is going on or has happened. Some of these signs are widespread among those who express passive aggression. These signs are as follows:

1. Resenting others' demands

When others make requests or demands of them, passive aggressive people will often view them as unfair or unjust. Rather than express their feelings, they will bottle them up and resent the other person for making the demands.

2. Deliberate procrastination

Procrastination is often a subconscious decision. With passive aggressive people, however, it is often a conscious decision. Rather than tell the other person that they cannot agree with their request, the passive aggressive person will delay completing the request until the very last moment, or later.

3. Intentional mistakes

Again, rather than say ‘No’, passive aggressive people sometimes find it easier to deliberately perform poorly at a task. The hope is that they will not be asked again due to the substandard work.

4. Hostile attitude

As they often assume that others know how they feel, passive aggressive people tend to immediately assume that anything they do not approve of was intended as a jibe at them. For example, they may assume that their boss knows that they have a full workload.

5. Complaints of injustice and lack of appreciation

With passive aggressive people, everything is viewed as an attack on them. When something doesn't go their way, it is seen as unfair or an injustice. It's all about how the world impacts on them.

6. Disguising criticism with compliments

At first, passive aggressive people may seem pleasant and warm. They often appear to be complimentary. It is only after they have left that you realise that a compliment was actually disguising a cheap jibe.

7. The last punch

Passive aggressive people love to throw the last punch. So much so that even when an argument has been reconciled, they slip one last insulting remark into the conversation.

8. The silent treatment

As stated at the start, passive aggressive behavior is recognizable by the disconnect between what is being said and what is being done. Nothing highlights this more than the famous silent treatment. Silence generally signifies agreement but not in this case. When you are on the receiving end of the silent treatment, you realize that the other person is far from agreeable (Buckley, 2014).

Once you identify that your interlocutor has signs of passive aggression, then that is the first step of dealing with it. Amanda L. Chan suggests some of the ways to deal with such a person. First of all, you should not be lenient and view passive aggression as it is – hostility. The next step is to make it clear for such a person that you won't tolerate any of the signs that person uses to express passive aggression—that is to say you set limits. Another important thing is to talk specifically, not generally, because the latter is likely to cause a confrontation. And the last way is to avoid aggressive communication, passive communication, and passive aggressive communication as well. On the other hand, you must stick to assertive communication by attempting to identify the problem, discuss it openly, and pay enough attention to the opinions of those who do not agree with you (Chan, 2014).

References

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