

■ Definition

This involves violating your own rights by failing to express honest feelings, thoughts and beliefs, and consequently permitting others to violate your rights. Passive or non-assertive behaviour can also mean expressing your thoughts and feelings in such an apologetic and self-effacing manner that others can easily disregard them. The passive responder allows others to walk all over them, like a doormat. Non-assertive people feel they have no control over events: they are controlled and immobilised. Passive people do not allow their needs to take precedence over, or be as valid as, others. They allow others to make their decisions for them, even though they may resent it later. They feel helpless, powerless and inhibited. Non-assertion sometimes shows a subtle lack of respect for the other person's ability to take disappointments, to shoulder some responsibility, and to handle their own problems.

The person who behaves passively is occasionally prone to such a build up of stress and anger that they eventually explode in a really aggressive manner.

■ Message communicated

I don't count, so you can take advantage of me. My feelings, needs and thoughts are less important than yours. I'll put up with just about anything from you.

■ Subconscious thoughts

Take care of me and understand my needs telepathically. Will you still love/respect me if I am assertive? I've got to protect you from hurt.

■ Goal

To appease others and to avoid conflict and unpleasantness at any cost.

■ Verbal and non-verbal characteristics

- ◆ Rambling; letting things slide without comment
- ◆ Beating about the bush – not saying what you mean
- ◆ Apologising inappropriately in a soft, unsteady voice
- ◆ Being unclear; averting gaze
- ◆ Posture – backing off from others, slouching shoulders
- ◆ Wringing hands; winking or laughing when expressing anger
- ◆ Covering mouth with hand
- ◆ Using phrases such as, '... if it wouldn't be too much trouble', '... but do whatever you want', 'I... er... um... would like... um... you... er... to do...'

■ Payoffs

You are praised for being selfless, a good sport. If things go wrong, as a passive follower, you are rarely blamed. Others will protect and look after you. You avoid, postpone, or hide the conflict that you fear.

■ Price

Others often make unreasonable demands on you. When, by your lack of assertion, you have allowed a relationship to develop in a way you don't like, then shifting the pattern becomes more difficult. You restrict yourself into other people's images of a lovable, good person. When you repress or bottle up so much anger and frustration, you simultaneously diminish other more positive feelings in yourself, including love and affection.