



Dealing with the Passive Aggressive Person

Passive aggressive behavior is more difficult to identify than aggressive behavior, unless you know what you are looking for.

What is passive-aggressive behavior? It is a pattern of indirectly expressing negative feelings rather than directly expressing them. The true feelings are expressed by the behavior rather than the words.

Here are questions you can use to determine whether or not you are dealing with a passive aggressive person. “Yes” answers mean the person is passive aggressive. Does the person:

- Frequently say one thing but do the opposite?
- Agree to do something but then sabotage it by being late, doing it wrong, or forgetting it?
- Seem constantly resentful and upset at perceived mistreatment?
- Express opposition at being told what to do?
- Constantly feel unappreciated?
- Accuse you of being controlling and overpowering in the relationship?
- Procrastinate on things you want done?
- Stir up intense anger in you?
- Deny his/her anger toward you?
- Blame you for everything in the relationship?
- Thwart your efforts to make any real change or decisions?

Passive aggressiveness is the opposite of making sure you mean what you say. Jesus told us to make our yes' and no's clear (Matthew 5:37). In other words, our actions should match our words. The difficulty in recognizing a passive aggressive person results from the tendency, especially in difficult relationships, to pay more attention to the person's words than their actions. When you do this, you will become confused. If you are dealing with a passive aggressive person, identify it and then pay attention to the actions. This won't change the behavior, but it will make things clearer to you and you will feel less confused. After you clearly recognize it, you can then decide what to do about it.

Passive aggressive people are insecure in the relationship. They see you as powerful and capable of overpowering them. They will accuse you of wanting to dominate and control them. You will be confused by this because you may actually feel dominated and controlled by them. They will blame you for everything in the relationship, but deny you any real power to make changes and decisions. When you recognize that a person is passive aggressive, you will need to decide how to deal with the behavior that is probably making you crazy.

The closer a person is to you, the more the passive aggressive behavior will be problematic. Jesus warned us to be on guard against people who will attempt to manipulate, harm, outmaneuver, and abuse us. When you have close relationships with people who aren't living and walking in the truth and are engaging in unhealthy behaviors, it is important that you recognize what you are dealing with and respond in a way that is healthy for you and the relationship. Here are four ways to deal with passive aggressive behavior:

Don't attack. Passive aggressive people evoke anger in other people and the anger usually isn't passive. You may have so much anger pent up inside of you that any time you interact, you are attacking and intense. This will only evoke more passive anger toward you, so even though it takes a tremendous amount of self-control, don't attack. Remember, you will be accused of attacking even when you don't, so you will need to learn to remain calm and state your truth in short non-defensive ways that focus on your needs and don't label, accuse, or criticize.

Encourage truth. When the passive aggressive person risks talking about feelings, issues, problems, and concerns, be careful not to be defensive or critical. Instead, encourage the truth and listen intently. You don't have to agree with what is being said, but you do need to make it a safe experience for the passive aggressive person who fears being vulnerable and is taking a huge risk in speaking his/her truth.

Resist lies. You have to hold firmly to the truth about you and the other person. Don't believe the untruths projected onto you. Passive aggressive people see things in others that aren't there. They project their own insecurities and weaknesses. Their fear of being dependent on you will cause them to see you as controlling when you may only be trying to fix the relationship, ask for cooperation, or talk about things that need to be discussed. Stand firm in your truth no matter what is said even when you can't convince the other person that what he/she believes is a lie. Don't allow yourself to be invalidated by giving up your truth.

Set boundaries. You will need boundaries to prevent the passive aggressive person from wrecking havoc in your life. Give time limits for what you need and have a backup plan if the person doesn't follow through. Adjust your expectations, so you won't be so dependent on the person acting differently. State your decisions and stick to them. Finally, decide how much you will tolerate before giving an ultimatum or ending the relationship.

Using these tools will empower you and enable you to respond without using anger yourself.