

STAYING COOL UNDER (PEER) PRESSURE: Using Digital Education Tools to Model Assertive Communication Skills

*By Jessica Silk**

Objectives

By the end of this lesson, participants will be able to:

1. List one characteristic of passive communication, one of aggressive communication, and one of assertive communication.
2. Demonstrate at least one way to say “no” to peer pressure to engage in sex.
3. Identify at least one digital education resource to use on a phone or computer to get more information about handling peer pressure effectively.

Rationale

Teaching effective communication skills is an important component of sex education. Without the ability to communicate and negotiate decisions, young people are not able to implement healthy decisions and may be put at risk. Classroom settings are limited in their ability to illustrate what pressure and effective responses look like in real-life situations. Digital education tools offer a new and compelling ways to show teens what passive, aggressive, and assertive communication styles look like when young people are being pressured to drink, use drugs or go upstairs alone with someone at a party. The digital tool on which this lesson is based was developed based on focus groups and conversations with more than 350 teens across the country. The tool, “The Kickback,” is designed to allow young people to see what happens when passive, assertive or aggressive communication is used. This tool can be used to supplement in person interactive activities, including brainstorming, group discussion, and skills practice about communication. Participants will also leave the lesson with new resources they can use on their phones or computers to further their learning.

Materials

- Flip chart paper or board, markers, tape
- Three pieces of flip chart paper, each with one of the terms and definitions below written on it:
PASSIVE COMMUNICATION:
Not expressing what you want, not saying your feelings, or saying nothing.

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AGGRESSIVE COMMUNICATION:

Asking for what you want or saying how you feel in a threatening, sarcastic, or mean way.

ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION:

Asking for what you want or saying how you feel in an honest and respectful way.

- A computer with Internet access, projector, and speakers to use “The Kickback” tool: <http://kickbackapp.org>

Note:

The educator should become familiar with “The Kickback” tool by trying it out on a computer as well as a mobile phone. During this lesson, participants are going to be able to choose responses and see a tailored video based on their responses. When you review the tool beforehand, be sure to go through and choose different responses so you can see the different responses participants may see.

- Scenario cards from the **Educator Resource: Speaking Up Role-Play: Scenarios**
- Scenario cards from the **Educator Resource: Speaking Up Role-Play: Advanced Scenarios**
- Cards from the **Educator Resource: Palm Cards**
- **Optional:** Extra pens or pencils for participants to fill out handouts.

Procedure

1. Tell the group that today's lesson is about responding to peer pressure and knowing how to communicate what you want in difficult situations.

Discussion Questions:

- a. What do we mean by “peer pressure”? (*Peer pressure is when friends or classmates try to get you to do (or not do) certain things. Peer pressure can be about negative or positive things, and all people experience peer pressure in their lives. Even adults face peer pressure. The choice of whether or not to give in to the pressure is up to you.*)
 - b. Can you name some things you might be pressured to do while you are a teen? (*Answers may include: sex, drugs, alcohol, bullying, skipping class, etc.*)
 - c. Can peer pressure ever be a good thing? (*Explain that pressure from peers is sometimes imposed to make healthy decisions, like the negative looks you might get from friends when not wearing a seatbelt or texting while driving; or several people speaking up when racist or homophobic language is used.*)
 - d. What are some possible negative consequences of peer pressure? (*Answers may include: getting into trouble, getting hurt, upsetting parents, going against your own values, getting pregnant, getting an STI, hurting someone, getting bad grades, etc*)
2. Explain that part of staying on track with your goals and getting what you want out of life is saying “no” to things like alcohol or sex before you’re older or ready. While saying “no” may sound easy,

it can actually feel a lot more difficult in the moment—especially when trying to say “no” to a friend or someone you are into because you don’t want to hurt their feelings or feel left out. That is why we are going to talk about how to say “no” in a way that is both respectful of others and confident in yourself.

3. Hang the flip chart paper with the explanations of passive, assertive and aggressive communication. Explain that there are three types of communication: Passive, Assertive, and Aggressive.
4. For each type of communication, have someone read the definition aloud and then ask the following questions:

Discussion Questions:

- a. For this type of communication, what would your voice sound like?
 - b. For this type of communication, what type of body language would you use?
5. Explain that everyone is going to look at a website where we will watch a set of videos that will show us what these types of communication look like in action. This website is called “The Kickback” and you can use it on a computer or look at it using your phone. Write the website <http://kickbackapp.org> on the board/flipchart
 6. On the computer, go to “The Kickback” tool (<http://kickbackapp.org>) and click “next” until you see the URL <https://www.kickbackapp.org/scenario-select.php>, which says “Tap a room to see what’s up” and shows an illustration of a house with three windows containing videos.

Note:

If possible, the educator should cue the website up to be on this page in order to save time.

7. Ask the participants if they know what a “kickback” is? *A kickback is a party.* Explain that the website allows us to look at different situations teens may face at a party by exploring different rooms.

Note:

This lesson uses a computer to look at “The Kickback” digital tool with the full group to facilitate a large group discussion. If cell phone use is allowed in your setting and participants work better in small groups, you can adapt this activity by allowing the participants to look at the app on their phones individually (they’ll need headphones/earphones) or in small groups. You could also have them use the tool in a computer lab.

8. Walk through the videos with the group. Ask the group to vote on which room to go in first and go through this procedure for all three rooms:

- A. Watch the video
- B. After the video, ask the following questions:

Discussion Questions:

- a. What would go through your mind if you got into this situation at a party?
 - b. What do you think of how the person said “no”?
 - c. What made the answer effective?
- C. After the group has discussed what worked, click on “next” and mention any of the bullet points on the site that weren’t mentioned.
- D. When the screen says “your turn,” ask for a volunteer to choose a response from the multiple choice options. If the choice is *assertive*, you will see the video and a validating response. If the choice is *not assertive*, you will get an explanation why it doesn’t work and then click on “watch an assertive response.”

Note:

If the class seems to always choose the assertive response, you may want to ask them to identify a passive or aggressive response (based on the definitions) so the class can see what this may look like and the kind of response they are likely to get.

- E. After you’ve seen the assertive response, allow the class to vote on pressing “I’m unsure” or “I’m confident.”

9. After you finish walking through the videos, ask the following process questions:

Discussion Questions:

- a. Are these situations things that you have or think you will experience? Why or why not?
- b. When you think about facing those kinds of situations, how do you feel?
- c. What are the main things you need to keep in mind to say “no” in a way that you are less likely to get additional pressure?
- d. In addition to what you say, how else do people communicate? (*Communication also includes body language, eye contact and tone of voice.*)

- e. In addition to saying “no”, you might also be in a situation where you need to *hear* “no”. Since not everybody knows how to say “no” in a clear, direct way, what do you need to do if you get any sense that someone doesn’t want to do something?
 - f. What are the consequences if you don’t hear the other person’s decision?
 - g. How confident do you feel about being able to say “no” to pressure? To hear no?
 - h. When might a person decide to say “yes”?
10. Explain that you are now going to break into pairs to practice speaking up for their decisions. Divide the group into pairs. Give each pair a card from the **Educator Resource: Speaking Up Role-Play: Scenarios**. Explain that in these scenarios, one person wants something that the other does not. In each pair, **Person 1** will open up the conversation, and **Person 2** will practice saying “no”. After two minutes, they will switch roles.
11. Ask for one or two volunteers to role-play in front of the large group and ask the following process questions after each role-play.

Discussion Questions:

- a. What worked well?
 - b. What are some ways that they could improve their response?
12. For the second step, participants will practice saying “no” to more challenging situations. Give each pair a card **Educator Resource: Speaking Up Role-Play: Advanced Scenarios**. One person (Person 2) in each pair will practice saying “no” to the other person (Person 1). After 2 minutes, they will switch roles.
13. Ask for one or two volunteers to role-play in front of the large group and ask the following process questions after each role-play.

Discussion Questions:

- a. What worked well?
- b. What are some ways that they could improve their responses?

14. Process the role-plays using the following discussion questions:

Discussion Questions:

- a. What happened during the role plays?
- b. How did it feel to practice saying “no”? How did it feel to hear “no”?
- c. What could happen if you don’t hear “no” from someone? (*Answers may include: you might hurt someone you care about, you might get in trouble with parents, school or even the law.*)
- d. Under what circumstances might you decide to say “yes” to any of these situations?
- e. What are the benefits of assertive communication? (*Answers may include: you get what you want, you can still be friends with someone, you won’t be mean, you won’t sound too weak or indecisive, you can make healthy choices, etc.*)
- f. What could make it difficult to use assertive communication in certain situations? What could you do to make it easier?
- g. What will you do differently now that you’ve seen the videos in “The Kickback” and practiced the role plays?
- h. How confident do you feel about using assertive communication in your life?

15. Thanks the participants for their efforts and explain that responding to peer pressure and knowing how to say “no” are skills that they’ll need for lots of situations throughout their lives. It may take some practice at first, but you will feel yourself becoming more and more confident as you practice. Hearing “no” is also a critical skill. You need to pay careful attention to make sure that if someone is uncomfortable with an action, you don’t put pressure on them as that can lead to hurting someone and/or getting in trouble with parents, school or even the law, depending on the situation.

16. Hand out the palm cards from the **Educator Resource: Palm Cards** and tell participants that there are some apps that can help them think about other situations in their lives. Refer the participants to the palm cards, and write the address **plannedparenthood.org/apps** on the board/flip chart.

Speaking Up Role-Play: Scenarios

Copy and cut this page into cards. Each pair will share one card. You may need to make multiple copies if you are working with a larger group. It's okay for multiple groups to get the same card.

(1)

Person 1: "Why don't you give me your number? I'll call you."

Person 2: You don't know this person well. You aren't sure it's safe.

*How can you respond using **assertive** communication?*

(2)

Person 1: "Why don't you sleep over my house tonight?"

Person 2: Your friend asks you to spend the night, but you want to stay home. You have to get up early for basketball practice.

*How can you respond using **assertive** communication?*

(3)

Person 1: "Can I borrow your homework? I didn't get to do mine last night."

Person 2: Your friend wants to "borrow" your homework. You don't want to get in trouble for cheating.

*How can you respond using **assertive** communication?*

(4)

Person 1: "Let's skip basketball practice today. I'm mad at Coach."

Person 2: Your friend wants you to skip basketball practice, but you don't want to and it's important to you to go.

*How can you respond using **assertive** communication?*

Speaking Up Role-Play: Advanced Scenarios

Copy and cut this page into cards. Each pair will share one card. You may need to make multiple copies if you are working with a larger group. It's OK for multiple groups to get the same card.

(5)

Person 1: "This beer doesn't taste too bad. Try it!"

Person 2: Your friend asks you to try a sip of beer. You don't want to drink alcohol.

*How can you respond using **assertive** communication?*

(6)

Person 1: "Your parents aren't home. Can I come over?"

Person 2: Your boyfriend or girlfriend asks to come over. Your parents aren't home and it's against your family's rules to invite guests over without permission.

*How can you respond using **assertive** communication?*

(7)

Person 1: "Here you go." (passes a joint)

Person 2: You are at a party and someone next to you passes you a joint. You don't want to try any drugs.

*How can you respond using **assertive** communication?*

(8)

Person 1: "I like talking to you. Let's go upstairs and find someplace more private to talk more."

Person 2: You are at a party and flirting with your crush. Your crush asks you to go someplace more private, but you're not ready for that and want to stick by closer to your friends.

*How can you respond using **assertive** communication?*

Palm Cards

Make copies of these cards and hand them out to participants to access the tools on their own for further learning.

Want to learn more? Try out these apps!

What's Your Love Personality? (for Girls):

lovepersonalityapp.org

Where Do You Stand? (for Boys):

whereyoustandapp.org

What's Your Future Plan?

yourplanapp.org

The Kickback

kickbackapp.org

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