**Lesson 7: Assertive Communication**

**Overview:** This lesson will build assertive communication skills necessary to refuse substance use. Students will compare assertive, aggressive, and passive communication. In a role-play situation, students will practice nonverbal and verbal assertive communication to refuse substance use.

National Health Education Standards

**Standard 1.** Students will comprehend concepts related to health promotion and disease prevention to enhance health.

**Standard 4.** Students will demonstrate the ability to use interpersonal communication skills to enhance health and avoid or reduce health risks.

Healthy Behavior Outcomes (HBOs):

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| --- | --- |
| **Alcohol and other drugs** | HBO 1: Avoid misuse and abuse of over-the-counter and prescription drugs. |
| HBO 2: Avoid experimentation with alcohol and other drugs. |
| HBO 3. Avoid the use of alcohol. |
| HBO 4: Avoid the use of illegal drugs. |
| **Tobacco** | HBO 1: Avoid using or experimenting with any form of tobacco. |

Lesson Objectives – Students will be able to:

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| **Objectives** | **Assessments** |
| 1. Describe the elements of assertive verbal and nonverbal communication. | Attachment 7.1 – Guided Notes |
| 1. Differentiate between aggressive, passive, and assertive communication styles. | Attachment 7.2 – Passive, Aggressive, Assertive |
| 1. Demonstrate effective verbal and nonverbal communication to deliver an assertive message to refuse substance use and support a healthy choice to prevent substance use. | Attachment 7.3a – Assertive Communication Practice |
| 1. Demonstrate the steps to ask for help and support to make a healthy choice to prevent substance use. | Attachment 7.3b – Asking for Help |
| 1. Identify a resource that could support behavioral health and/or healthy choices that prevent substance use. | Attachment 7.3b – Asking for Help |

Introduction:

* In a previous lesson, we practiced making thoughtful decisions using the Stop, Think, Choose. Today, we are going to learn how to communicate a healthy decision using assertive verbal and nonverbal messages.
* Inform students that they will be listening and talking with a partner today.
* One student (A) is the speaker; the other student (B) is the listener. Student A speaks to Student B about their favorite animal, band, snack, physical activity, or other item. Student B can only listen. Then they switch roles.
* Demonstrate with a volunteer from the class; the teacher is the speaker; the student is the listener.
* Allow time for each person to have a turn as the speaker and listener. Then bring the whole class together for a debrief period.
* What can you remember about the story?
* What verbal communication was demonstrated?
  + Content of the message – clear and specific words and phrases
  + Tone, volume, clarity, and pace
* What nonverbal communication do you think was demonstrated?
* What strategies did you notice about the speaker? (Examples: body language, posture, hand gestures, head nodding, eye contact, proximity)

Teaching Steps:

Activity 1: Communication Guided Notes

* Use Attachment 7.1: Guided Notes.
* What does the activity tell us about communication? What about listening skills?
* What are two forms of communication?
* What are the different styles we can use to communicate a message?
* Communication is an important skill in health education. Communication requires both speaking and listening. There are two forms of communication to convey information — verbal and nonverbal.
* We use both nonverbal and verbal communication to share important decisions with others.
* Our verbal and nonverbal messages must be consistent, especially when making a decision regarding misuse of prescription medication or substance use.
  + Verbal communication = words (simple way for students to remember term)
    - Communicating through spoken language, written language, or sign language.
  + Nonverbal communication = no words (simple way for students to remember term)
    - Communicating through gestures, eye contact, and body language.
* When sharing a decision, we need to be assertive with our nonverbal communication. It is important to make eye contact and stand up straight and tall.
* Effective communication requires listening. Active listening is listening with all senses to hear and process important information.
* Signs of an active listener: Nodding head to indicate understanding; making eye contact; giving full attention.
* What words did you hear from your partner? What words did you remember? Why did you remember those?
* What nonverbal messages did you notice? What nonverbal messages did you send to show you were an active listener?
* What can you do to be sure your message is heard and clearly understood?

Activity 2: What Will You Say? Verbal Communication

* When you have made the decision to make a healthy choice to prevent substance use, you will say it with both your words and your actions. Let’s work on your words. Here’s a quick way to say NO (Attachment 7.3):
  + Say the word NO.
  + Say it in a firm tone: Speak clearly, calmly, confidently, and concisely (the 4 C’s); no arguing.
  + Repeat if necessary. You may need to say it more than once. Give a reason using our Know to NO! principles.
  + Suggest an alternative or give a specific reason.
  + Use actions and body language to support your NO message.
* Watch me demonstrate how to say no when my friend asks if I would like to try vaping while we’re walking home from school.
  + “No, I don’t want to.” Your friend asks again. “No, I don’t want to. It is unhealthy, and I don’t want to get addicted to nicotine. Let’s just keep walking.”
  + We also must think about our nonverbal communication.
  + Make eye contact: Look directly at the person.
  + Stand straight up; keep shoulders back so your body conveys, “I am confident.”

Activity 3: How We Say It: Assertive Communication

* *Step 1:* We are going to watch this video clip to understand three communication styles: passive, assertive, and aggressive. As you are watching, consider one word that represents each style and consider which style is most effective in this video*.*
  + [Passive, Aggressive and Assertive Communication](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6LcPfnwGec) (1:26)
    - Ask students to share out what word they came up with for each style.
    - What style is most effective here and why?
  + Guided notes align with video: passive, aggressive, and assertive
  + Passive: An individual does not share how they feel or what they are thinking. Individual chooses the other person’s feelings and thoughts over their own (gives in), which may result in being taken advantage of. An individual may do this to avoid a perceived conflict.
    - Model (whole class): Scenario – Your friends offer a hit of their vape while at a band/sport party. Have students write an example of a passive response.
    - Example: “OK, I guess so.” (Model nonverbal passive communication.)
  + Aggressive: Individual expresses thoughts and feelings in a way that only considers themselves and not the receiver (listener). This style is one-sided. There is often disrespect associated. The receiver may react defensively.
    - Model (whole class): Scenario – Your friends offer you a hit of their vape while at a party. Have students write an example of an aggressive response.
    - Example: “You’re so stupid. I can’t believe this, get out of my face!”
  + Assertive: Individual firmly expresses their thoughts and feelings in a respectful manner. Individual does not violate the rights of the receiver.
    - Example: “I’m not interested. I don’t want to become hooked on vaping, and I need my lungs to play my instrument and be good at my sport.”
    - Model (whole class): Scenario – Your friends offer you a hit of their vape while at a band/sport party. Have students write an example of an assertive response.
  + Remind students that assertive communication is typically the best communication style to use, but there are times when aggressive and passive styles may be used. For example, if the person offering drugs continues to pressure after an assertive response, then an aggressive statement — “I said NO, and I mean it!” — might have to be used. An example of when it is OK to be passive is if the situation is dangerous. In this case, it’s safer to walk away and leave the situation without saying anything.
* *Step 2:* Aggressive, Passive, Assertive Identification Practice Sheet (Attachment 7.2)
  + Have students read the scenario and identify whether the statement is aggressive, passive, or assertive.
  + Review answers with the students:
    - 1A: Passive
    - 1B: Assertive
    - 1C: Aggressive
    - 2A: Assertive
    - 2B: Passive
    - 2C: Aggressive
    - 3A: Aggressive
    - 3B: Passive
    - 3C: Assertive
  + Additional skill practice: Students work individually or in pairs or small groups to read and work through each statement identifying statements as passive, assertive, or aggressive.
  + *Option A:* Model example: Non-ATOD example
  + Mr. Health made a mistake with your lunch tray and forgot to give you a vegetable.
    - Identify which communication style is represented in each statement and circle the most effective statement.
    - “You really screwed up. I am supposed to have sweet potatoes on my tray.” (Answer: Aggressive)
    - “I appreciate you serving my lunch today. I am supposed to have a vegetable. May I have a serving of sweet potato?” (Answer: Assertive)
    - You do not communicate with Mr. Health about the missing food item. (Answer: Passive)
  + Extension task: Ask students to rework the aggressive statement to become an assertive statement.
  + Allow students to volunteer to read each scenario and identify the aggressive, assertive, and passive responses.
* **Step 3:** Review nonverbal communication that supports an assertive refusal skill to stay drug-free. We can be aggressive, passive, or assertive with our nonverbal communication also. Assertive nonverbal communication looks like:
  + Body language
    - Stand tall with your head up.
  + Be aware of your gestures.
  + Tone of voice
  + Be direct and speak at a volume they can hear — but not yelling.
  + Speak clearly, calmly, and steadily.
  + Eye contact

Activity 4: Creating and Delivering Assertive Messages

* Let’s practice creating an assertive message for the following situation.
  + A person offers you a cigarette.
    - Step 1. Develop your verbal message. What will you say? (Share Attachment 7.1 to help remember critical elements.)
    - Step 2: How will you say it?
  + Write how you will say it to be assertive.
* Try it out. Find a partner and share your assertive message. Your partner can use the checklist (Attachment 7.3) to determine if you were assertive.
  + If the person will not accept your answer, try again and restate your decision and your reasons. Don’t argue; if the second try does not work, just leave the situation. If you need help, you can reach out to a trusted adult for additional strategies, support, or resources.
  + If you recognize that your friend needs support and assistance, you can reach out and show you care.
    - Share – I understand (share the situation). Would you like to talk about it, or can we reach out to a resource for help or support?
    - Lesson 9 (How Can I Help?) will provide an opportunity to practice asking for help and support for yourself and others.

Closure:

* Today we discussed verbal and nonverbal communication and three communication styles.
* When avoiding substances, it is important to use both verbal and nonverbal communication.
* How does being assertive help you to make healthy choices to avoid substance use?

Attachment 7.1: Guided Notes

Part I. Communication

1. Communication requires both \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
2. There are two forms of communication: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

Verbal Communication

1. Verbal communication uses \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

Nonverbal Communication

1. Nonverbal communication requires \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ words.
2. Nonverbal communication is communicating through \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and body language.
3. Verbal and nonverbal communication must be \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
4. Active listening is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ with all \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

Part II. How We Say It – Communication Styles

Choose the type of communication style described in the statement.

1. \_\_\_\_\_Individual chooses the other person’s feelings and thoughts over their own (gives in).
   1. Aggressive
   2. Assertive
   3. Passive
2. \_\_\_\_\_Individual expresses thoughts and feelings in a way that only considers themselves and not the receiver (listener).
   1. Aggressive
   2. Assertive
   3. Passive
3. \_\_\_\_\_Individual firmly expresses their thoughts and feelings in a respectful manner. \
   1. Aggressive
   2. Assertive
   3. Passive

Attachment 7.2: Passive, Assertive, or Aggressive

Directions: Label the following statements as Aggressive, Assertive or Passive.

Scenario 1: A group of people are talking about your friend Jim.

1. 1A: \_\_\_\_\_You listen but don’t make any comments.
   1. Aggressive
   2. Assertive
   3. Passive
2. 1B: \_\_\_\_\_You say, “I don’t feel comfortable talking about Jim when he’s not here. Let’s talk about something else.”
   1. Aggressive
   2. Assertive
   3. Passive
3. 1C: \_\_\_\_\_ You say, “You are a bunch of gossips!”
   1. Aggressive
   2. Assertive
   3. Passive

Scenario 2: Your teacher graded your test incorrectly.

1. 2A: \_\_\_\_\_  You say, “I believe my paper was marked incorrectly. Would you please look at Question 4?”
   1. Aggressive
   2. Assertive
   3. Passive
2. 2B: \_\_\_\_\_ You don’t say anything and accept the grade.
   1. Aggressive
   2. Assertive
   3. Passive
3. 2C: \_\_\_\_\_ You approach the teacher and say, “You’re wrong. You have to fix this!”
   1. Aggressive
   2. Assertive
   3. Passive

Scenario 3: You play basketball and have not been getting much playing time.

1. 3A: \_\_\_\_\_ You approach the coach and say, “This is not fair!”
   1. Aggressive
   2. Assertive
   3. Passive
2. 3B: \_\_\_\_\_ You quit the team.
   1. Aggressive
   2. Assertive
   3. Passive
3. 3C: \_\_\_\_\_ You ask the coach if this is a good time to speak with them and say, “I would like to earn more playing time. Can you give me some tips?”
4. Aggressive
5. Assertive
6. Passive

Attachment 7.3a: Assertive Refusal Message Practice (Designer make this a checklist)

What will you say? Write your message below.

1. Say the word NO.
2. Say it in a firm tone. Speak clearly, calmly, confidently, and concisely (the 4 C’s) — but no arguing.
3. Repeat if necessary.
4. Suggest an alternative.
5. Use actions and body language to support your NO message.

How will you say it?

* Body language
  + Stand tall with your head up.
  + Be aware of your gestures.
* Tone of voice
  + Be direct and speak in a volume they can hear — but not yelling.
  + Speak clearly, calmly, and steadily.
* Eye contact

**Scenario:** Your friends offer you a hit of their vape while at a band/sport party.

Write your assertive message to refuse to use the vape.

List a resource you could use to help with this situation.