

# USING ASSERTIVENESS TO COMMUNICATE ABOUT SEX

- ✓ 1. To build learners communication and conflict resolution skills.
- ✓ 2. To develop learners skills to communicate about, make decisions about and negotiate sex.

🕒 15-20 minutes

★ **Worksheet: 'Communication Scenarios' (provided)**  
**Teacher Answer Key (provided)**

## PROCEDURE

- 1 Explain to learners that there are different styles of communication, and that people have different ways of getting others to do what they want, or of responding to this pressure. Explain the following styles:

**AGGRESSIVE:** Someone is aggressive when they tend to act in a hostile or angry way, especially when they want something or when confronted. When dealing with conflict, someone who is aggressive is not likely to address the problem in a fair and sensitive way, instead they may be more likely to ignore their own role in the problem and become defensive. They may shout, use insults or even become violent. This person may use aggressive behaviour to get their way, even if it hurts others emotionally or physically. This includes taking what you want at the expense of others, threatening or forcing a person to give you something, or saying 'No' in a way that is mean or degrading to another person.

**PASSIVE:** A personality trait where someone allows things to happen or who accepts what other people do or decide without trying to change anything. This may be because they do not think their needs and ideas are as important as those of others, because they want to avoid conflict, or because they lack self-esteem, feel fearful or intimidated. Passive people may allow others to have their way, say 'Yes' when they don't really want to, in order to be liked or not hurt the other person's feelings, and they may not express if they are uncomfortable or bothered by something, or if they have changed their mind.

**MANIPULATIVE:** Someone is manipulative when they control or dominate another person for their own benefit and advantages. It usually implies a more subtle control than aggressive behaviour. This includes getting what you want or turning someone down in a dishonest way, making someone feel good so that you can get what you want, or doing something for somebody only so they will give you what you want.

**ASSERTIVE:** An assertive person sees their needs and feelings as important, and is able to share them in a clear, confident and respectful way. This includes asking for what you want or giving people an honest "no" to things you don't want. Being assertive is not the same as being aggressive, and in conflict situations assertive people do not intentionally hurt others emotionally or physically, but also encourage other people to share their feelings in a respectful way.

- 2 Explain to learners that being **assertive** is the best way to communicate, while being honest and respectful of yourself and others. Instead of **aggressively** demanding control, or **passively** giving it up, assertiveness helps you tell others what you want - honestly - and without hurting others emotionally or physically. These skills are particularly helpful in relationships, when you are faced with situations of potential conflict. Assertiveness helps you respond to those who use the other techniques of communication, and helps you avoid being pushed into what they want, or pushing them into what you want. It is important to be as assertive in saying 'Yes', as in saying 'No', and in communicating both big and smaller decisions.

- 3 Note some of these assertive behaviours on the chalkboard:

- Making 'I' statements (I think ..., I want ...)
- Expressing opinions (I believe ...)
- Saying 'No' firmly but respectfully
- Asking for what you want
- Initiating conversations
- Expressing positive feelings
- Expressing appreciation
- Stating your strengths and abilities ('I can ...')
- Making statements that express aspects of one's identity (culture, sexual orientation, religion) when one chooses to do so
- Paying attention to word choice, tone of voice, and body language so that you sound calm and in control but not angry.

- 4 Give each learner a copy of the 'Communication Scenarios' worksheet (provided).

- 5 Learners should fill in the empty speech bubble in each scenario, by using the skills listed above to create assertive but respectful responses.

6 Ask learners to share their answers. Facilitate a discussion by including questions such as:

- a. What communication strategy (aggression, passiveness, manipulation, assertiveness) is the first speaker in each scenario demonstrating?
- b. How do you feel about this?
- c. In Scenarios 2 and 5, what kinds of communication do the second speakers demonstrate?
- d. Why might this be a problem?
- e. Do individuals who are more **assertive** have a responsibility to ensure that their partners are comfortable speaking to them, and do not feel pressured?
- f. How would you resolve each situation? (Ask learners to share their responses).
- g. Which responses (suggested by learners) might be most effective? Why?

The Teacher Answer Key provides a range of effective possibilities that you could compare to learners' responses. You could also suggest some yourself.

7 Conclude by explaining that it is important to know yourself, as well as your partner, and to understand how best to communicate. Emphasise that the more assertive partner, should take the time to understand what the less assertive partner really wants and that they are not just trying to please. Similarly, if one tends to be more passive, then one should request time to make decisions, and find the right words to communicate that decision to the partner.

8 You could allow learners (in pairs) any remaining time to practice using assertiveness skills.

## TEACHER TIPS



### General

Learners may act silly, make jokes, mock each other or withdraw because of the overt sexual content in the exercise which adolescents might find amusing or uncomfortable. You can minimise this by preparing the class for the sexual content before the exercise. Tell them that you will be talking about sex, and even though they may find that amusing, the discussion about negotiating **sex**, and **sexual coercion** is really important. For this reason you would like them to focus on the exercise and give the issues their full attention. You may want to re-emphasise this before asking learners to read their responses aloud, and add that it is important to show respect, and to be non-judgemental when listening to other's efforts.



### Making the Link with Gender & Violence

The exercise prepares learners with some skills they may need to negotiate sex and hopefully avoid coerced and unsafe sex. This is particularly useful to learners whose personalities, cultures and life experiences may predispose them to different forms of violence.



### Assessment Ideas

Learners, in pairs, could be given time to prepare a skit that demonstrates at least one other style of communication; and where they should use assertiveness to resolve a conflict. By practicing assertiveness skills within skits, the teacher can assess whether the learners are familiarising themselves with the concept of assertiveness.



### Variation

Learners can also act out the scenarios to make the exercise more interactive.

Learners can be asked to draw their own comic strip where the characters use assertiveness skills in negotiating sex.

Personal reflection on the communication style they most often use, and how they may change this to become more assertive and respectful of themselves and others.



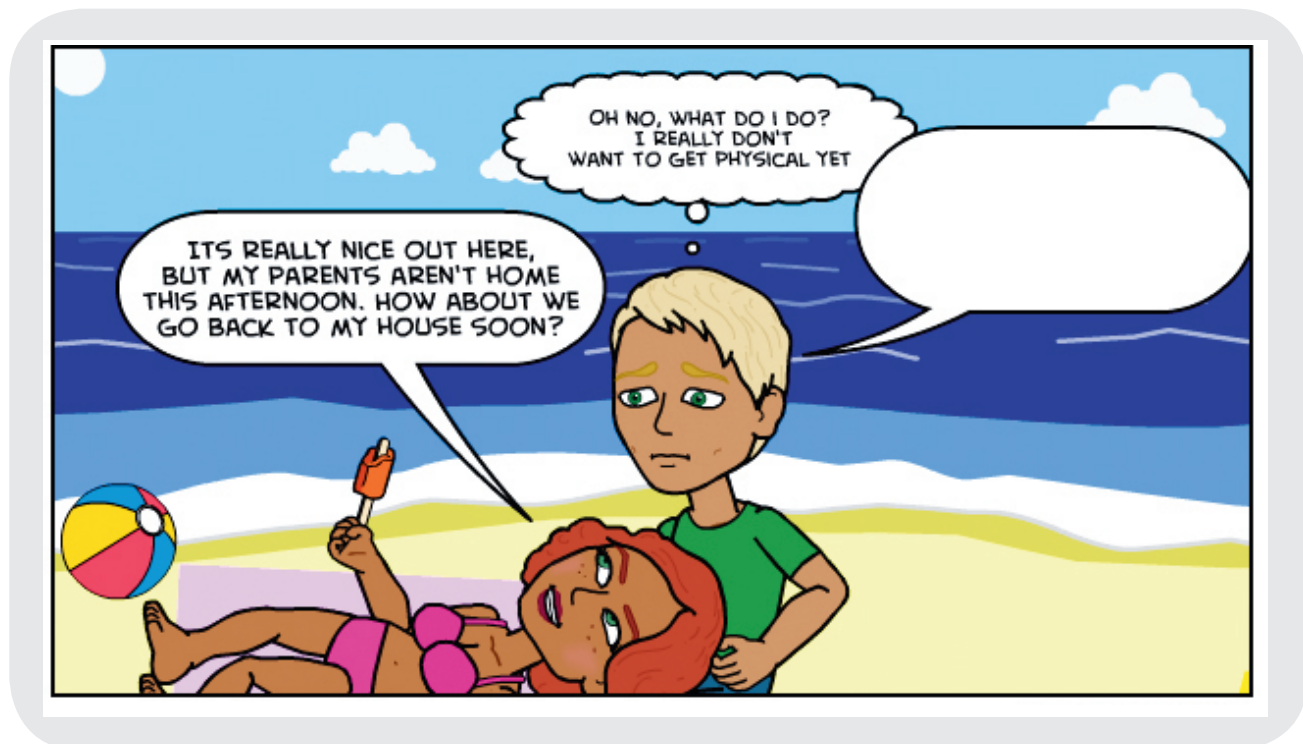
# COMMUNICATION SCENARIOS

Fill in the empty speech bubbles using assertive communication.

## - SCENARIO 1 -



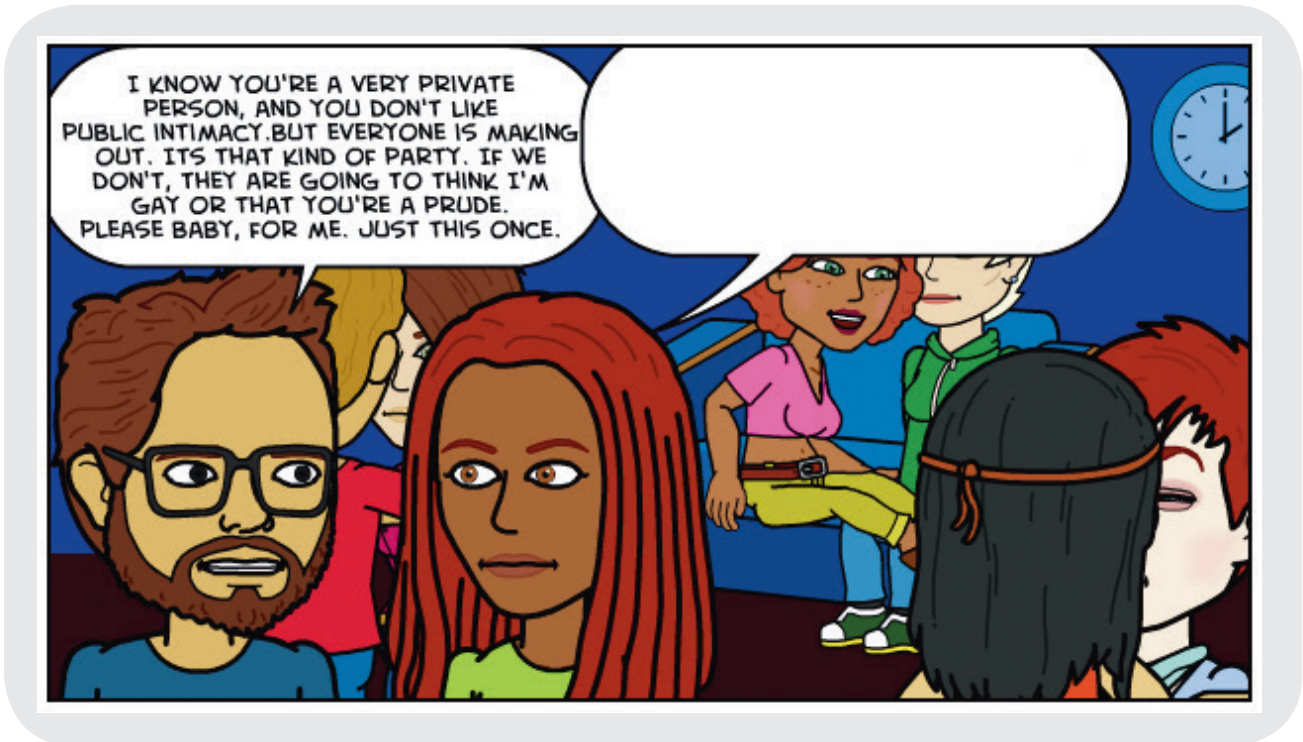
## - SCENARIO 2 -



# COMMUNICATION SCENARIOS

Fill in the empty speech bubbles using assertive communication.

## - SCENARIO 3 -



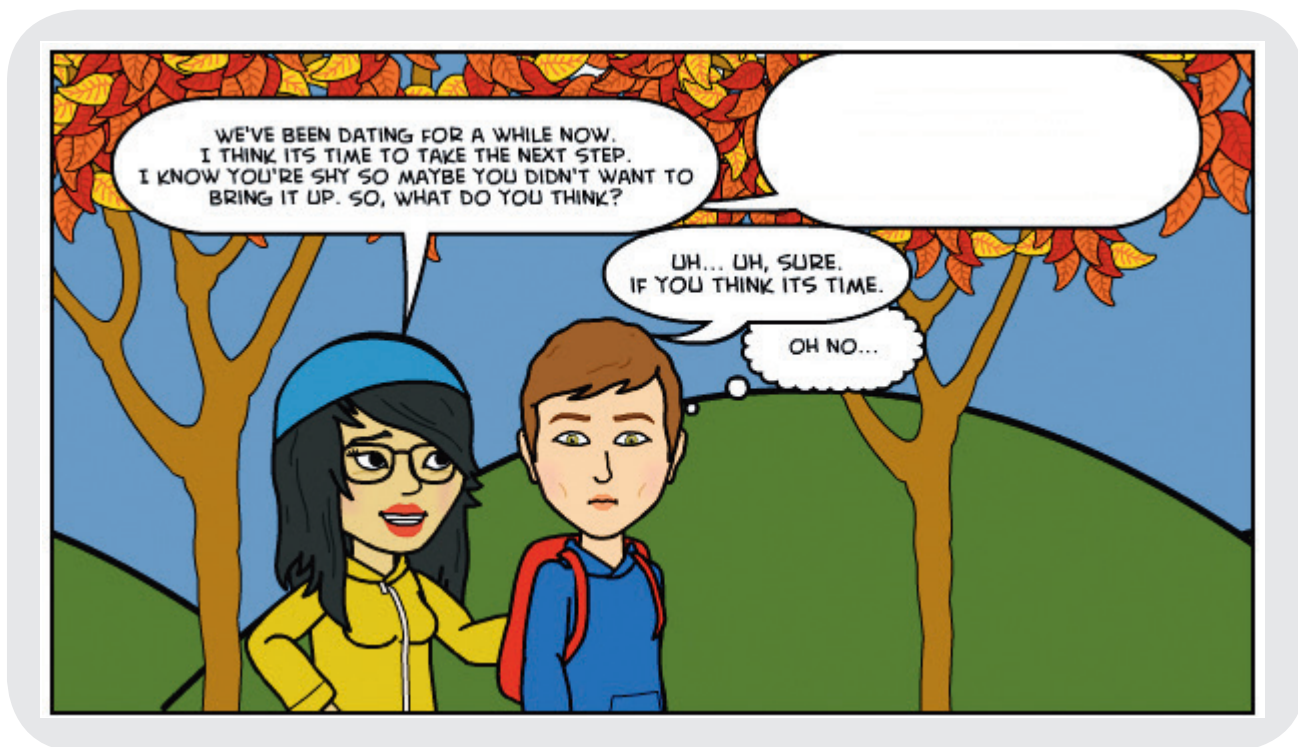
## - SCENARIO 4 -



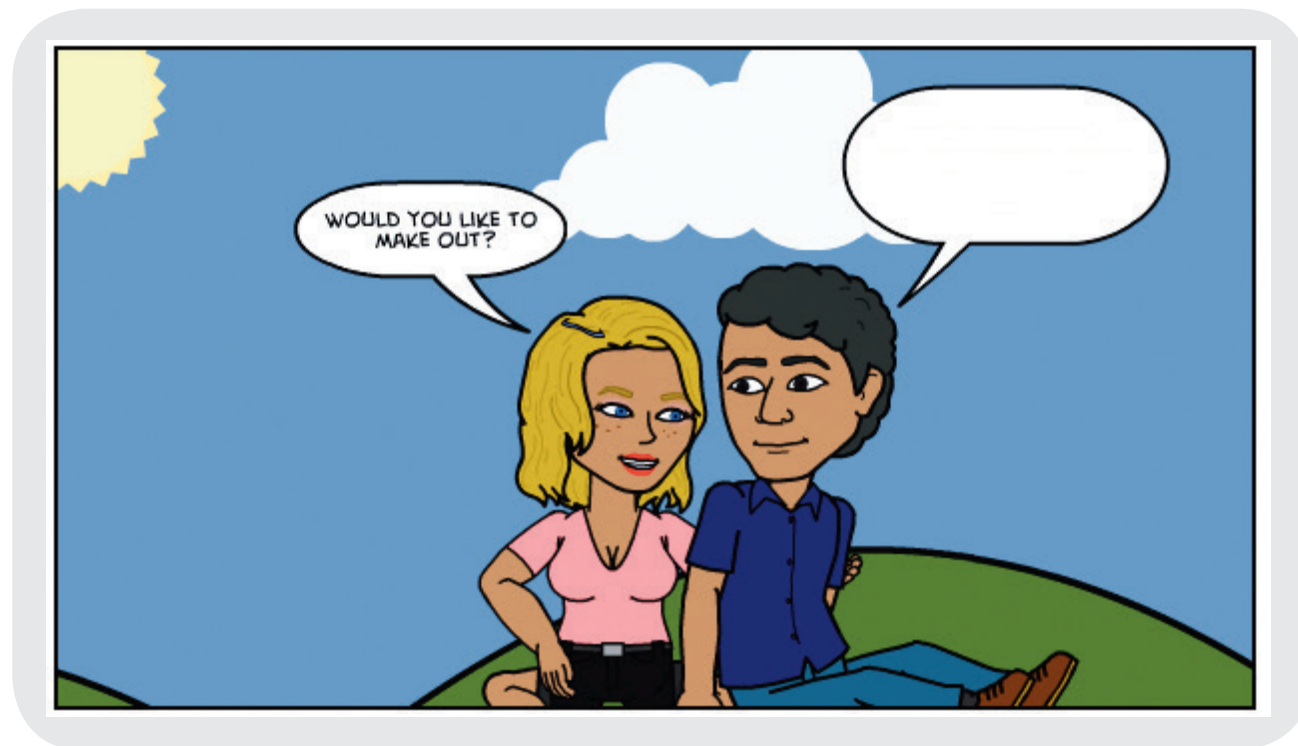
# COMMUNICATION SCENARIOS

Fill in the empty speech bubbles using assertive communication.

## - SCENARIO 5 -



## - SCENARIO 6 -



# TEACHER ANSWER KEY

SCENARIO	COMMUNICATION STYLES:	POSSIBLE ASSERTIVE RESPONSES
	SPEAKER 1	SPEAKER 2
1	MANIPULATIVE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This isn't about trust. This is about respect. I want to be with someone who respects me, and themselves, enough to only have safe sex.</li> <li>• Condoms are the safest way to have sex. No condom, no sex.</li> <li>• Please don't ask me that. I do trust you, but safe sex is very important to me, and I need you to understand if we are going to have a relationship.</li> <li>• I do trust you. But I also really value our health and don't want us to take any risks.</li> </ul>
2	ASSERTIVE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It's really nice here. Let's just stay here today. I don't think I am ready for that yet.</li> <li>• I need to think about things first. Let's just stay out here today. We can talk about what you would like to do when your parents are away again and make sure we are on the same page.</li> <li>• I really like you so this is hard for me to say, but I am not ready for our relationship to become more physical just yet.</li> <li>• I don't feel ready yet. I hope that is ok, because I think you are great and I really enjoy what we have.</li> </ul>
3	MANIPULATIVE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I'm sorry but I just do not feel comfortable with that. If you are not having fun at the party let's just leave?</li> <li>• My stance is still the same. I do not want to do anything in front of all these people. Please respect that.</li> <li>• Please do not pressure me to do something you know I do not want to do. That is not fair and it will not change my mind.</li> <li>• I love you and want you to be happy, but I cannot agree. For this relationship to work you have to care more about my feelings than what other people think.</li> </ul>

# TEACHER ANSWER KEY

SCENARIO	COMMUNICATION STYLES:	SOME POSSIBLE ASSERTIVE RESPONSES
	<b>SPEAKER 1</b>	<b>SPEAKER 2</b>
<b>4</b>	AGGRESSIVE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am sorry but I can't do that. It is important to talk about when we want to have sex and not just make sudden decisions. Please respect that.</li> <li>• I'm sorry that you feel like you've had to wait too long. We haven't been dating very long, and I'm not ready. You have to respect that or we cannot continue this relationship.</li> <li>• No, that is not going to happen tonight. I would first like to get to know you better. Let's talk instead.</li> <li>• Please do not pressure me. I will only have sex with someone I trust, and this behaviour does not make me trust you.</li> <li>• I do not want our first time to be at a party like this. Why don't we talk about this more tomorrow and we can make sure that when it happens, we both have the experience that we want.</li> <li>• It is not sexy at all when you are aggressive. I don't want to have sex with you tonight. If you cannot respect that I will call my parents to pick me up.</li> </ul>
<b>5</b>	ASSERTIVE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You don't sound sure. Let's talk about this another time once you've had a chance to think about what you really want to do.</li> <li>• I don't think it's time. It is only time when we are both ready.</li> <li>• I only want to take the next steps when you are ready. You don't sound very sure right now, but I can wait.</li> <li>• Let's talk about this again in a few days. Please think about what you want and what you don't want, so we can talk about it then.</li> <li>• You sound uncertain. I don't want to pressure you. I really like you and respect you, so please don't be afraid to say what you really think.</li> </ul>
<b>6</b>	ASSERTIVE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I love that you're asking me first. Yes!</li> <li>• It's so great that you take consent as seriously as I do. Yes!</li> <li>• I feel ready. If you are too, then I would love to.</li> <li>• I would really like that. We've both been tested recently so I am ready for our relationship to get physical.</li> <li>• I love that you're asking me first. I feel quite nervous, but you are so considerate I feel much more comfortable. Let's give it a try.</li> </ul>