

# THE PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE CO-WORKER

You face a deadline and your co-worker hasn't even started his part of the assignment. You spend an hour talking to a co-worker about problems with your son and now the whole office seems to know about them. Your co-worker asks if you need help, then doesn't touch the work you gave her – and neglects to tell you.

The co-worker with passive-aggressive traits can create a difficult work environment. Things go wrong and it's hard to point to why. You wonder if your co-worker is deliberately sabotaging the work. You wonder what you did to earn such hostility. If this sounds familiar, you may be dealing with a passive-aggressive co worker.

Learning to spot someone with these behaviors and then to take steps to deflect problems can ease your work day. You can tell if a person has passive-aggressive behaviors rather quickly. Do you know someone who:

- Complains of feeling tired or sick, especially when something special is about to happen?
- Runs late much of the time?
- Argues with others about all sorts of issues, both large and small?
- Forgets important appointments or tasks, even when following-through is to the person's advantage?
- Says yes, but then does just the opposite to what was agreed?
- Acts indifferent or tearful when things don't go his or her way?
- Feels sick often or has many accidents due to clumsiness?
- Takes credit for something he or she didn't do or shifts blame to take attention away from his or her mistakes?

People use passive-aggressive behaviors to deal with intense anger. They learned to show a pleasant front while turning anger against others.

No one likes anger, and most parents don't tolerate angry outbursts in children past a certain age. Suppressing anger helps avoid any danger that might come from it. Anger signals the possibility of aggression.

When properly focused into some constructive activity or to iron out differences in a relationship, anger can have a positive outcome. But when used destructively, anger hurts.

You probably learned an assortment of techniques to avoid aggressive behavior when angry. Maybe you vent anger by talking or exercising. Maybe you use relaxation techniques to calm yourself. Maybe you push anger out of your awareness and focus the energy on doing something constructive, like cleaning closets or washing the car.

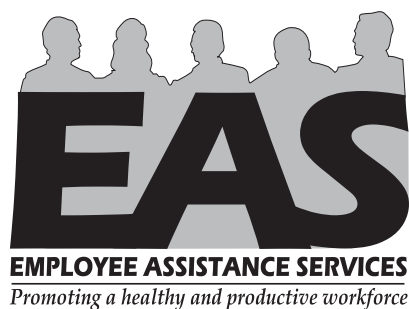
People with passive-aggressive tendencies learned to hide anger, but not to defuse it through venting or constructive behaviors. Instead, the passive-aggressive person may act agreeable and seem laid-back, while boiling with rage on the inside. This rage, fueled by feelings of powerlessness and a need to control, leads to behaviors that create difficulties for the person and those around him or her.

If you are the target of passive aggressive behavior, you may end up feeling hurt or betrayed. To deal with passive aggressive behaviors in the workplace, use these ten tips:

1. **Leave a paper trail.** This may mean weekly memos to your supervisor, meeting minutes, or asking co-workers to initial documents.
2. **Keep your expectations crystal clear.** Make assignments in writing, and outline specific results and timelines.
3. **Insist on hearing instructions for yourself.** Don't agree to let the passive-aggressive person act as a switchboard between you and another co-worker.
4. **Don't talk about your personal life** – anything you share may be shared with others in an unflattering way
5. **Don't gossip** – if someone wants to tell you about everyone else in the office, beware! That person is probably talking about you too.
6. **Stay calm** – use a light touch to defend yourself when the passive aggressive person takes credit for something you've done or blames you for something that is his or her fault
7. **Be friendly – but not friends.** A consistently cordial approach can deflect the passive-aggressive person's attention.
8. **Expect results, not excuses.** Failure to meet a deadline or complete a task is a performance issue and should be treated as such. When dealing with a co-worker, calmly point to your documentation – see numbers 1 and 2 above.
9. **Challenge distortions of the truth.** Don't let the other person bend the truth to protect him or herself at your expense.
10. **Use the "power of three"** – having a neutral witness during any discussions will help if something goes wrong. Remember to support other people who become the target of passive-aggressive behaviors.

It may help to keep in mind that the person with passive aggressive traits may not grasp the long-term effects of these behaviors on career and relationships. To deflect the impact on you, take care to use anger management skills to reduce a potential power struggle and stand-off. A thoughtful, calm, and direct approach will help you in dealing with any conflict.

*For more information on how you can cope with a passive aggressive coworker, contact:*



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