

Passive Aggression



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You will have noticed that people sometimes approach their points indirectly. At best, this is the method of enlightened education and discourse, but it is also the method of predatory manipulation and deceit. In any case it is communication and every transmission must be interpreted. Suppose you are the recipient of a passive aggressive transmission from your partner in the form of silence, sarcasm or misdirection. Suppose you just asked whether they still love you and they are poignantly silent, pursing their lips and looking away. There might be any number of important statements or questions lurking behind

this transmission, but none of them have been specified in it. You may know what the real message is from prior experience and context, or you may be left guessing. From here the conversation can converge on whatever the real message might be, or it can deteriorate to offensive and defensive rhetoric. Straightforward communication is compromised by passive aggressive behavior, by definition, so how should you deal with it?

The first and far most important thing is to prepare yourself to hear the truth and deal with it in a generous and constructive way. Your passive aggressive interlocutor has reasons for coming at you sideways. They may be trying to avoid conflict or resistance, or they may be unprepared to debate the real issue with confidence. They may be punishing you for something or begging you to understand and anticipate them. Whatever their reasons for indirection, you should translate their transmission into straightforward language and respond in a spirit of earnest and compassionate discourse. If you can maintain this difficult posture, the conversation will be drawn back to a more constructive course. Issues can be resolved, neutralized or transformed into opportunities. Passive aggressive behavior can and should be properly interpreted and understood. Trust me. Call me.

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