

CHEAT SHEET

SETTING BOUNDARIES WITH WIDE

WIDE is a verbal self-defense pattern for dealing with passive-aggressive people. It is designed to help you 'call out' the covert tactics used during spiteful, sarcastic or boundary-pushing behaviour. To use WIDE, structure a feedback message in four parts.

When you _____.

I assumed _____.

Did you mean _____? (A passive-aggressive person generally replies 'no' at this point.)

Even so, that's how it looked/sounded to me when you _____

The purpose of the WIDE formula is to clearly establish boundaries with people who are resorting to passive-aggressive tactics. Your boundaries are your first line of defense when dealing with chronically difficult behaviour. This is because you may not be able to change other people, but you CAN choose how much their words and behaviours impact on you. It can take up to three repetitions of your boundary statement before your message gets through. So, if the message doesn't get through the first time, reinforce and reiterate your WIDE statement.

Examples of WIDE statements

- When you roll your eyes while I'm talking, I assume you're trying to say you think my ideas are stupid. Did you mean to say that? [Pause to allow the person to respond.] Even so, that's how it looked to me when you rolled your eyes just now.
- When you don't answer my 'hello', I assume you are refusing to talk to me. Did you mean to do that? [Pause to allow the person to respond.] Even so, that's how it looked to me when you walked past me this morning.
- When you answer 'nothing's wrong at all' in that tone, I assume you're saying you're not willing to tell me about something that is bothering you. Did you mean to imply that? [Pause to allow the person to respond.] Even so, that's how you sounded when you responded to my question.
- When you say 'great outfit' in that sarcastic tone, I assume you're implying you don't like my outfit. Did you mean me to think that? [Pause to allow the person to respond.] Even so, that's how you sounded.