

Assertiveness

SPEAK YOUR NEEDS. RESPECT OTHERS. STAY TRUE TO YOU.

WHAT IS ASSERTIVENESS?

Assertiveness is the ability to express your thoughts, feelings and needs clearly and respectfully, while also considering the rights of others. It means standing up for yourself without being aggressive or passive, and communicating in a way that is honest, calm and kind.

WHY IT MATTERS

- ✓ Helps you get your needs met
- ✓ Reduces resentment and stress
- ✓ Builds healthier, more authentic relationships
- ✓ Supports self-respect and confidence
- ✓ Supports better problem-solving and collaboration

ASSERTIVENESS IS NOT...

- ✗ Aggression (being harsh or disrespectful)
- ✗ Passivity (keeping your needs to yourself)
- ✗ Manipulation (getting your way unfairly)
- ✗ Always saying "no"
- ✗ Ignoring the needs of others

Communication Styles Compared

STYLE	FOCUS	TYPICAL BEHAVIOUR	COMMON PHRASES	LIKELY OUTCOME
Passive	Others' needs (ignores own)	Avoids conflict, stays quiet, apologises, finds it hard to say no	"It's fine." "I don't mind." "Whatever you want."	Needs often unmet; can lead to resentment and low self-esteem
Aggressive	Own needs (ignores others)	Pushes, blames, interrupts, can be critical or dismissive	"You need to..." "This is your fault." "Do what I say."	May get short-term results but can damage relationships and create conflict
Passive-Aggressive	Indirect expression of own needs	Seems agreeable but shows displeasure through sarcasm, silence or subtle digs	"It's fine." (cold tone) "Whatever." (sighs, delays)	Creates confusion and mistrust; issues often remain unresolved
Assertive	Own needs and others' needs	Expresses thoughts openly, listens, is respectful, sets clear boundaries	"I feel..." "I need..." "Can we find a solution together?"	Greater understanding, stronger relationships, needs more likely to be met

How to Be More Assertive

- 1 BE CLEAR**
Say what you think, feel or need in a direct and simple way.
- 2 USE "I" STATEMENTS**
Take ownership of your experience rather than blaming or criticising.
- 3 BE SPECIFIC**
Clearly state what you need or would like.
- 4 KEEP A CALM TONE**
Speak in a steady, respectful voice.
- 5 LISTEN TO OTHERS**
Be open to their perspective, even if you disagree.
- 6 SET BOUNDARIES**
It's okay to say no. You can be kind and clear at the same time.
- 7 PRACTISE**
Assertiveness gets easier with use. Start with small, low-risk situations.

Useful Phrases

EXPRESSING A FEELING	"I feel concerned about..."
STATING A NEED	"I need some time to think about that."
SETTING A BOUNDARY	"I'm not comfortable with that."
SAYING NO	"Thank you for thinking of me, but I'm not able to do that."
REQUESTING CHANGE	"I would like us to find a different way to handle this."
ACKNOWLEDGING THE OTHER PERSON	"I understand your point of view, and I also need..."
FINDING A SOLUTION	"Can we look at some options together?"

REFLECTION

- 1** In which situations is it hardest for you to be assertive?
- 2** What might get in the way (e.g. fear, guilt, past experiences)?
- 3** What is one small step you can take this week?
- 4** How might being more assertive improve your relationships?

SOURCES

Alberti, R.E. & Emmons, M.L. (1970/2017). Your Perfect Right: Assertiveness and Equality in Your Life and Relationships.
Wolpe, J. (1958). Psychotherapy by Reciprocal Inhibition.

NOTE

Evidence-informed educational resource.
Independently written and designed for
B&F educational use.