

Assertive Behaviour

Some people confuse assertiveness with aggression, and think that to assert yourself is to stand one's ground and argue a point without compromise. Assertiveness is certainly about standing up for your rights – but in a way that does not violate the rights of others. Being assertive means communicating your needs, wants, feelings, beliefs and opinions to others in a direct and honest manner, without intentionally hurting anyone's feelings.

It is helpful to imagine assertiveness as the middle ground between aggression and passivity. The use of bully tactics is destructive to relationships and, ultimately, to your self-esteem. Remaining passive may help you to avoid conflict, but the price paid includes feelings of helplessness and lack of control. Direct communication can reduce conflict, build your self-confidence, and enhance your personal and work relationships. Assertiveness is a skill anyone can learn.

“It is about taking control, not so much of others, but rather, of your own life....”

- **The Advantages of Assertive Behaviour**

The use of aggressive behaviours, such as verbal or physical threats, may get you what you want in the short term, but your relationships will suffer. On the other hand, passive behaviour can also ruin relationships, because your own needs, wants and feelings are ignored in favour of avoiding arguments. The advantages of using assertive behaviour in your dealings with others include.....

- ✓ your needs, wants and feelings are understood by others
- ✓ nobody's feelings are intentionally hurt, and both parties feel respected and heard
- ✓ the relationship can potentially be strengthened by the honest exchange of concerns
- ✓ you feel more in control of your own life and hence, your self-esteem is enhanced
- ✓ you have a better chance of getting what you want.

- **Contrasting Aggressive, Assertive and Passive Behaviours**

Aggressive behaviour - verbal and nonverbal messages that blame or label, loaded words, put-down words, clenched hands, abrupt gestures, finger pointing, fist pointing, invasion of other's personal space, loud voice, tense or shrill voice – often designed to control or intimidate others

Assertive behaviour - verbal and nonverbal clear statement of position and honest statement of needs, direct statements and messages, active listening, relaxed open posture, upright firm voice, even and well modulated

Passive behaviour - verbal and nonverbal apologetic words, veiled meanings, hedging, failing to come to the point, stooped, excessive head nodding, leaning for support, weak, hesitant, soft voice

- **A Learned Skill**

Like any other skill, assertiveness takes time to learn. Some suggestions you might consider are ...

- ✓ Decide that you want to be assertive rather than aggressive or passive.
- ✓ Practise talking in an assertive way alone or with a friend.
- ✓ Respect the needs and feelings of others - accept their viewpoints may be different to yours.
- ✓ Take a problem-solving approach to conflict, and try to see the other person as your partner rather than your opposition.

- ✓ Tell the other person honestly how you feel, without making accusations or trying to make them feel guilty.
- ✓ Use assertive language such as 'I feel'. "I perceive" or 'I believe', rather than aggressive language such as 'You always' and 'You never'
- ✓ Don't interrupt the other person when they are talking, and try hard to listen and understand their point of view.
- ✓ Suggest that you brainstorm ways to solve the problem together.
- ✓ If the exchange doesn't go well, learn from the experience and plan how you will do things a little differently next time.

- **Keep Your Cool !**

Despite your best efforts to be direct and calm, the other person will sometimes behave like you're having an argument and want to yell, criticise and goad. Suggestions include....

- ✓ Tell the person you'll take up the subject again at another time, and leave.
- ✓ If you decide to stick it out - remain calm, steer the conversation back to the original point, and try to understand the other person's point of view.
- ✓ Appreciate there may be other issues motivating the behaviour of the other person.
- ✓ Don't take heat-of-the-moment criticisms to heart.
- ✓ Afterwards, learn from the experience and try to think up better ways to negotiate a similar scenario.

- **What Are some Rights At Work?**

- ✓ To be clear about what is expected of you and to say 'no' to unreasonable requests
- ✓ To work in a safe working environment, free of harassment or bullying of any kind
- ✓ To be consulted about decisions that affect you
- ✓ To refuse unreasonable requests without feeling guilt
- ✓ To make occasional mistakes but be held fairly accountable
- ✓ To express an opinion and be listened to and taken seriously
- ✓ To get on with the job once the objectives and constraints have been agreed

- **Making Requests Assertively**

Assertive people aren't afraid to ask for what they want. Here are some suggestions for you:

- ✓ Work out what you want to ask – carefully consider the way you will phrase your request
- ✓ Don't apologize profusely, although acknowledge if there is some inconvenience for them
- ✓ Keep it short, but give a reason for your request
- ✓ Consider whether there is anything which you can offer the other person in return for their agreeing to your request, particularly if it they will be disadvantaged in some way
- ✓ Respect the other person's right to say no and don't take refusal personally

**Saying “*The way I see it...*”,
can be assertive, without
being dominant .**

The essence of assertiveness is being able to state your case without arousing the defences of the other person. The secret to success lies in saying how it is for you rather than what they should or shouldn't do. Being assertive means communicating with others in a direct and honest manner without intentionally hurting anyone's feelings.