

Assertive Behaviour

Some people confuse assertive behaviour with aggression, and mistakenly think that to assert yourself is to stand your ground and refuse to compromise in any way.

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, but in a way that still shows respect for them.

- **The Advantages of Assertive Behaviour**

The use of aggressive behaviours, such as verbal or physical threats, may get a person what they want in the short term, but at the expense of any goodwill in their relationships. On the other hand, passive behaviour can also cause damage to relationships, because your own needs and feelings are ignored in favour of “keeping the peace”. You can eventually end up feeling quite frustrated within yourself.

The advantages of developing more assertive behaviour and learning to communicate assertively with others include.....

- i. your needs, wants and feelings are more likely understood by others
- ii. nobody's feelings are intentionally hurt, and both parties feel respected and heard
- iii. the relationship can potentially be strengthened by the honest exchange of concerns
- iv. you feel more in control of your own life and hence, your self-esteem is enhanced

- **Assertiveness Is About Keeping Your Cool !**

Aggressive behaviour is often driven by anger and emotion – with communication becoming heated and typically negative, and sometimes even threatening in tone.

In contrast, assertive communication can be firm – however the assertive person remains calm and in control of any feelings of annoyance. If you find yourself in a discussion that has become heated, assertive steps could include....

1. Tell the person you'll continue discussing the subject, but at another time, and walk away
2. If you decide to stick it out - remain calm, steer the conversation back to the issue in dispute
3. Try to understand the other person's point of view.
4. Appreciate there may be other pressures impacting upon the behaviour of the other person.
5. Don't take heat-of-the-moment criticisms from the other person to heart.
6. Exercise self-control - just because you may think something, that doesn't mean you have to say it. So weigh up your words and the situation carefully before you open your mouth
7. Show the other person you are willing to search for a fair outcome – one that works for you both

8. Afterwards, try and learn from the experience and try to think up better ways to deal with it

The essence of assertiveness is being able to honestly explain your case or concern to another, without causing them to get defensive. The secret to success is in explaining how it is for you - rather than trying to blame or manipulate the other person.

Being assertive means communicating with others in a direct and honest manner – finding the right balance between respect for self and respect for the other person. It is a communication style that is more likely to lead to long-lasting and rewarding relationships based upon mutual esteem.

***Performance Development** is a corporate training company based in Melbourne that offers Assertive Skills training. The author, Brian Carroll, is a highly experienced psychologist.*

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*If you want to view some **video clips on Assertive Skills**, then visit <http://www.WhatIsAssertiveness.com>*

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