

How to be assertive

Being assertive can help you communicate more effectively with others, which can improve the quality of your relationships and help you ensure your needs are being met.

Being assertive means expressing your opinion clearly and directly. It doesn't mean being aggressive. Being aggressive often damages relationships and involves only considering your own needs, refusing to compromise, losing control and forcing your opinions on to others. On the other hand, assertiveness means respectfully expressing your needs in a controlled manner, being reasonable, equally considering the needs of others and using clear language to express your points. All of this often involves compromise.

When being assertive, you need to pay attention to your vocal tone, body language, content and actions. Here are some suggestions that might help you be assertive:

- Don't shout or whisper. Speak calmly and directly at a normal conversation volume and sound firm, but not aggressive or angry.
- Honestly tell the person how you feel and listen carefully to what they say in response.
- Stand tall and look the person in the eye while you're speaking. Your body language needs to reflect confidence in what you're saying.
- Don't exaggerate by using words such as "never" or "always", making threats or being sarcastic
- Avoid making judgments, state the facts instead.
- Try to avoid accusing the other person of things. You can usually reword "you statements" ("you're upsetting me") into "I statements" ("I feel upset when you don't ask me how my appointment was"). Statements beginning with "I want" or "I need" are also useful (e.g. "I want to go for a walk after dinner").
- Start off by stating that you recognise the other person's wants/situation/feelings or beliefs, and then assert your own. This means that you're being sensitive to others without disregarding your own needs
- Make an effort to listen to the other person's response. You can demonstrate that you are listening with your body language (by nodding, or looking them in the eye), or by paraphrasing what they've said when they've finished. If you listen to them attentively, they're more likely to listen to you.
- It's important to remember that although being assertive is likely to help, it doesn't mean that other people will necessarily respond the way you would like them to.

When have you been assertive in the past?

How did that go?

When have you not been assertive in the past and regretted it?

In what situations would you like to be able to communicate more assertively and effectively?

What could you say (remembering the difference between assertiveness and aggressiveness)?

This structure may help: “*I feel* _____

when you _____

because _____.

I want/need _____.”

When will you say it?

What do you need to do to arrange this conversation?

How do you think you will feel after saying it?