

ASSERTIVENESS

What is Assertiveness?

Assertiveness is an attitude and a way of relating to the outside world, backed up by a set of skills for effective communication. To be truly assertive, you need to see yourself as being of worth and as having a right to enjoy life. At the same time, you value others equally, respecting their right to an opinion and to enjoy themselves.

Assertive communication allows you to communicate appropriately in a direct, open and honest way.

When you communicate assertively, you overcome the fear of speaking your mind or trying to influence others. Such communication is respectful of personal boundaries, both yours and other peoples, and ensures that you don't feel others take advantage of you.

Being assertive involves using the skill of saying what we need or want and protecting ourselves from what we do not want, whilst respecting the needs and wishes of others.

When we allow the needs, opinions or judgment of others to become more important than our own, we can feel hurt, anxious and even angry. This can lead to indirect, emotionally dishonest and self-denying behaviours.

Many people feel that if they attend to their legitimate needs and assert their rights they are being selfish. Selfishness, however, is concerned with only our own rights, with little or no regard for others. Implicit in our rights is the fact that we are concerned about the legitimate rights of others as well.

Assertive people

Feel free to express their feelings, thoughts, and desires.

Know their rights.

Have control over their anger. It does not mean that they repress this feeling. It means that they control it and can talk about it in a reasoning manner.

Say, "yes" when they want to, and say "no" when they mean "no" (rather than agreeing to do something just to please someone else)

Decide on, and stick to, clear boundaries - being happy to defend their position, even if it provokes conflict

Are confident about handling conflict if it occurs

Understand how to negotiate if two people want different outcomes

Are able to talk openly about themselves and can listen to others

Are able to give and receive positive and negative feedback

Have a positive, optimistic outlook

What is the difference between assertiveness & aggression?

Assertiveness can be seen as the mid-point between passive and aggressive ways of being.

Being passive

Being passive is a response to feeling that we must be 'nice' people. We become compliant, believing that certain behaviors will lead to our being judged and rejected, or we fear confrontation and become anxious to avoid this. Passive behavior can be perceived as manipulative and may elicit a care-taking, non-challenging response in others.

Being aggressive

Being aggressive is a response to feeling powerless. Aggressive behavior is any behaviour that gives us power over others. It may take the form of threats, bullying, sarcasm, fighting etc. It is likely to elicit a defensive or aggressive response from others.

Behaving both passively and aggressively

Sometimes this can happen, when we keep feelings locked inside, leading to a state of resentment. If we are always 'nice', this can leave us feeling that we are often exploited. If the build-up gets too much, we may get to a point where we explode inappropriately or at the wrong target.

How to learn to be assertive.

Practice not saying 'yes' when we really mean 'no'.

It is important to connect to our feelings and use them to help us recognize what we want to change. It will help if we can express our emotions to an appropriate person in a non-blaming way. Communicating our feelings gives us a chance to be better understood or improve our relationships.

Brooding too long over an incident is only likely to make matters worse. Non-assertive people often assume others should be able to spot their hurt or anger even though they don't say what they feel.

We can set clear boundaries by learning to say no without apologizing unnecessarily. Excuses, apologies and explanations can often be superfluous. Whilst knowing that our agenda is important, it is helpful to take time to hear another's point of view and to remember that it is not always possible to get what we want.

Change does not happen overnight, and others may react differently to us as we change. Learning to be assertive is about experimenting with new ways of communicating.

My rights to assert myself include

1. I have the right to state my own needs and to set my own priorities as a person, independent of any roles that I may assume in my life.
2. I have the right to be treated with respect as an intelligent, capable and equal human being.
3. I have the right to express my feelings.
4. I have the right to express my opinions and values.
5. I have the right to say 'yes' or 'no' for myself.
6. I have the right to make mistakes.
7. I have the right to change my mind.
8. I have the right to say that I don't understand.
9. I have the right to ask for what I want.
10. I have the right to decline responsibility for other people's problems.
11. I have the right to deal with others without being dependent on them for approval.

12. Other people have the right to all of the above.

Three steps to assertive behavior

1. Identify the behavior that concerns you: e.g., "when you put me down about the way I look..."
2. Identify your feelings about the behavior: e.g., "I feel angry and deflated..."
3. Say what you want to happen: e.g. "and I would like you to consider my feelings and not do it again."

Suggested Reading on Assertiveness

Assertiveness Step by Step

Windy Dryden and Daniel Constantinou, Sheldon Press

Your Perfect Right

Alberti, R.E. and Emmons, M.L Impact

A Woman in Your Own Right

Dickson, Anne - Quartet Books, London

Feel the Fear and Do it Anyway

Jeffers, S.

Assertion Training: How to be who you really are

Rees, S. and Graham, R.S. Routledge

Asserting Yourself: How to Feel Confident about Getting More from Life

Cathy Birch, How to Books,

Further details about our resources are available on:

www.bangor.ac.uk/student-services/counselling/ or contact us on 01248 388520 / counselling@bangor.ac.uk for an appointment.