

Top Tips for Being Assertive

Know Your Passive/Aggressive Points

Keep an assertiveness diary for two weeks and document times when you regret being passive or aggressive. At the end of the two weeks, look for patterns. Do you respond more passively/aggressively in some situations than in others? Are you more passive or aggressive with specific people? Use this information to help you plan your assertiveness. When you need to be assertive, take time beforehand to plan what you want to say and how you want to say it.

Be Assertive in your Body Language and Speech

When it comes to assertiveness *how* you speak is just as important as what you say. Notice what messages you convey through your body language and speech. Do you slouch? Avoid eye contact? Fiddle nervously with your hands? Practice using assertive body language instead. Stand up straight with your shoulders back, leave your hands by your side or in your lap, and maintain eye contact. Speak in a clear, firm voice at a normal pace, pitch, and volume.

Use Assertive Language

Language is an important tool in assertive communication. When asking for what you want, stick to the facts and use short statements starting with "I would like..." to describe what you want. Avoid hinting at what you want by saying things like "Do you think that maybe..." If there are barriers to your request, don't feel pressure to come up with the solution. It's ok to ask the other person to come up with a solution: "I appreciate your concerns, what do you suggest we do? How can we get around this problem?" Planning and practicing what you want to say will help you to break unassertive habits.

Practice Saying No

If you find it hard to say no, grade your practice. For example, start by saying no to "safe" people (e.g. family, close friends) before practicing on work colleagues and bosses. Try to keep your no's brief, remember you have a right to say no so there's no need to preface your no with an apology or to give an elaborate explanation. If you genuinely want to help the person requesting your help, try offering to help at an alternative time or offer another solution.

Think Assertively

How you think affects how you feel. Criticising yourself not only makes you feel bad, it makes it harder for you to be assertive. Monitor your thoughts and notice how you speak to yourself before and during situations where you wish you'd been more assertive. Is your self-talk helpful or unhelpful? Is it assertive or passive? Evaluate your self-talk and look at how you can think more assertively.

ASSERTIVENESS

Assertiveness means finding the right balance between standing up for your own wants and needs and being sensitive to the needs and wants of others.

Being assertive might mean:

- **Saying no to others when you're too busy to help or when their requests are unreasonable**
- **Asking for help**
- **Expressing frustration**
- **Sharing your opinion instead of going along with everyone else**

A need to please is often behind a reliance on unassertive communication, but being "others" focused is tiring and it sends an unhealthy message to yourself - what other people want or need is more important than what you want or need.

Building assertiveness skills and breaking free of your need to please can help you to:

- **Feel happier and more in control**
- **Feel more heard and understood**
- **Have stronger, more balanced relationships**

Breaking the need to please can be challenging. If you need additional help to build stronger assertive communication skills seek the advice of a clinical psychologist.