

Assertiveness

Assertiveness is a way of communicating your needs and wants without threatening others. It is often misunderstood as aggressiveness. While being aggressive can violate and hurt others, assertiveness allows us to maintain our boundaries, and helps our relationships with others in the long-run.

In being assertive, we maintain our self-respect and respect others. When we are aggressive, we do not.

Assertiveness is a great friend of self-esteem. Without it, we cannot express what we really feel, leaving us at risk of becoming a doormat for someone else. Learning assertiveness is not something that will happen overnight, but it can happen and is a skill that will impact the rest of your life.

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Models of Assertiveness

Your present level of assertiveness could well have been learned from your upbringing. When faced with conflict, how did your family members respond? How did your father and mother resolve conflict? How did they teach you to get what you need and want? Your parents may have learned to behave aggressively from their parents, and you may have learned to behave aggressively from them. It takes a conscious effort to break the chain and now that you are your own person, you have the power to do that.

Think about a person who mistreated you. What happened and what did you do? How will things be with that person in six months' time and a year from now? Their behavior will likely be exactly the same. Why do you think that is? Unless we demand change, things will stay the

same. The same goes with the way you talk to yourself. If you talk harshly to yourself, you will still be talking badly to yourself next month unless you make a conscious effort to change.

Are You Unassertive?

Here are some unassertive thoughts. See if there any that apply to you:

- It's selfish to say what I want.
- I'm ashamed and embarrassed to say what I want.
- People will laugh at me if I say what I think.

You Can Become Assertive!

The first step to changing unassertive behaviors is to recognize that they exist. Write down five situations when you didn't speak up, even though you disagreed with something and had something to say. What thoughts did you have at the time? Can you think of a more assertive alternative?

Saying "no" is one of the hardest things for someone lacking self-esteem and assertiveness. If you've said "yes" when you really wanted to say "no", you're probably aware of the negative feelings that can arise. Saying "no" regularly when you mean "yes" can lead to resentment and hostility.

It's important to recognize your personal reasons for why you are reluctant to say "no". Is it that you feel it is rude, unfriendly, selfish, disrespectful or perhaps something else?

You Have the Right to Your Answer

Although you may believe that your reasons for saying "no" are valid and healthy, there are in fact many reasons why saying "yes" is more productive. If you can honestly state what you are feeling, it opens the gate for a genuine discussion. Both parties will feel liberated. Remember your Bill of Rights – you have a right to say "no", just like anybody else.

We can learn to say "no" by simply saying it, and not cushioning it in excuses or blame. You can always express that you are happy they've asked and be polite, but a direct "no" is often all you need to say. Sometimes people will badger you until they get the response they are looking for. In that case, repeat "no". Stand your ground. They will eventually understand that when you say "no", you mean it.

Key Points

- Assertiveness is a way of communicating our needs and wants without being aggressive.
- Learning to become assertive helps us to enforce our boundaries.
- The ability to say "no" is an important part of assertiveness.

- Sometimes you may have to say “no” several times for a person to understand that you mean it.

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