

## Assertiveness

Assertive is a word psychologists use to describe a person who is able to make clear decisions in a situation and not be swayed unhelpfully by those around them. An assertive person is neither passive nor aggressive – is neither walked over nor forces their own way. **Passive** people do not defend their own personal boundaries and so allow aggressive people to harm or unduly influence them. They are also not likely to risk trying to influence anyone else. **Aggressive** people do not respect the personal boundaries of others and are therefore liable to harm others while trying to influence them. **Assertive** people communicate clearly, but doing so in a way that respects the personal boundaries of others.

- They feel free to express their feelings, thoughts, and desires.
- They know their rights and responsibilities.
- They have control over their anger. It does not mean that they repress this feeling. It means that they control it for the time being and then talk about it later in a logical way.
- They have a good understanding of feelings of the person with whom they are communicating.

Techniques can be used to make you more assertive in a situation. One technique is called the “broken record” technique where you stick to your guns and keep saying the same thing when you are challenged but this can annoy people as well! Another techniques is called “fogging” where you defuse the situation by agreeing to PART of what the person says, but then use “I-statements” to disagree with the rest. E.g.; “That seems like a good idea, but I am not free at that time.”

People who are Assertive have these five characteristics. Spend some time thinking about which you may need to work on. It may be good to ask a friend to say how you do on each of these things as well!

Are you...	Example	Yes	Not Sure	No
<b>Open</b>	Are you clear about what you want so that there is no misunderstanding?			
<b>Direct</b>	Do you talk to the person who needs to be addressed rather than talking to the whole group or to another person?			
<b>Honest</b>	Do you say what you really think or what you think the other person wants to hear?			
<b>Appropriate</b>	Are you being polite? Is this the best time to say this? [Note: sometimes there is no ‘best’ time, but often there is]			
<b>Personal</b>	Are you using “ <u>I</u> -statements” where appropriate? Using “ <u>You</u> -statements” can make the person feel unnecessarily threatened as they can often sound like accusations and can be based on assumptions.			

You can attend courses on assertiveness if this is something you feel you need to work on. They may be available through your employer or the local council. It is important to practice being assertive in a safe environment as this will make you more likely to handle difficult situations well. It can seem a bit silly doing role-plays, but it is a lot less silly than never actually addressing the issue [Denial]. Below are some situations that you may want to practice in after you have done some role plays – they get progressively harder. [From Trevor Powell’s ‘*Handbook of Mental Health*’. ISBN: 978-0863883309]

- Ask the lodger to put the top on the toothpaste [EASY]
- Ask the children to tidy up their bedrooms
- Ask my sister to return the DVD she borrowed
- Tell the neighbours to keep the noise down at night
- Tell mum how much I like her and give her a cuddle
- Apologise to a colleague for snapping at her the other day
- Tell my wife when I feel I want to be left alone
- Delegate a commitment to a colleague for the next six months [HARD]