

Assertiveness

Do people take advantage of you often? Are you “volunteered” to drive? Do you end up paying more than your share of the housing expenses? Do other people use your things without asking, assuming you won’t mind? Do you say nothing about any of these situations?

If this sounds like you, perhaps you need to take a look at your *assertiveness*. Why? Unhappiness, frustration, and anger often accompany a lack of assertiveness. Being assertive can serve us well in many situations: at work, at home, as customers, on vacation, any situation at all!

The What and Why of Assertiveness

Being passive means letting other people violate your rights and not doing anything about it. Being aggressive means getting what you want while violating the rights of others. Being assertive means standing up for yourself without violating the rights of others.

Being assertive allows you to say what you want to say in a healthy, positive way. If you are assertive, you are more likely to resolve conflict successfully and keep your relationships healthy and happy. While others might not like seeing you stand up for yourself, especially if they have been able to take advantage of you in the past, you will be happier with your role in your relationships.

What You Can Do

Observe your own behavior and keep track of assertiveness. Are you asserting yourself adequately? Are you satisfied with your effectiveness in relationships? Assess how you feel about yourself and your behavior. Make a log or diary for a week. Be honest with yourself!

Observe an effective model. Watch someone who handles situations well. Watch for the behaviors and style. If the model is a friend, discuss his/her approach and the consequences. What are some other options?

Imagine yourself handling situations differently. Visualize yourself dealing effectively with a variety of situations. Be assertive, but be as much of your “natural self” as you can. Repeat this often until you can imagine a comfortable and effective style for yourself.



Give it a try. Find a trusted friend and role play. Get some practice saying “no”, “I have an idea,” or “that solution doesn’t really work for me.” The more you practice, the greater your confidence. Have your role-play partner play different roles and give you feedback.

Conflict Resolution

The following are different approaches to resolving conflict. While all are appropriate for certain conflicts, the key is using the best strategy for the situation at hand.

- Avoidance - This is dodging the situation or person. It works well for a cooling off period, but is not helpful as a standard for how you may solve conflict.
- Competition - Seeing who can win. This works well for sports teams, but seeing how many people you can “get on your side” is not helpful in an argument.
- Compromise - Both parties get something, but neither party gets all of what they want. This is the most highly used and effective method of resolution. The key for success is knowing when to compromise and when to stand firm.

Changing behavior is a process. Honor your style and skills; what works for others may not work for you. The goal is more confidence and consistency with your assertiveness.

