

# Assertiveness and Communication



WORKABLE TOOLS FOR YOUR SUCCESS TOOLKIT

## What is assertiveness

Assertiveness is a way of thinking, behaving, and communicating with others. When you are assertive you are able to express yourself (your feelings, thoughts, beliefs, emotions, and opinions) in an open manner, while still being able to respect the rights of other people. Assertiveness

may appear to come naturally to some people, but like all skills it is also a learned behaviour. When you think about growing up, you changed and adapted your behaviour based on response you received from people around you (such as parents, friends, classmates,

teachers, employers, authority figures, etc). Perhaps, when growing up, you were taught that you should always try to please others, or that you shouldn't express negative emotions such as anger or sadness.



## What is in your Toolbox?

- What is assertive behaviour?
- Different communication styles
- What's in it for me?
- What's my style?
- Tips to becoming more assertive

## Styles of communication

You might find that you can be assertive in certain situations but not in others. For example, you may be able to be assertive with co-workers but have a hard time saying no to family members or close friends. Assertiveness is one style of communication, and a style that we should strive for. Other styles of communication include being passive, being aggressive, and being passive-aggressive.

Is he being  
assertive, passive or  
aggressive in his  
communication  
style?



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BEING PASSIVE—  
 AGGRESSIVE IS  
 ANOTHER STYLE OF  
 COMMUNICATION  
 WHERE PEOPLE DON'T  
 OPENLY CONFRONT AN  
 ISSUE BUT SHOW THEIR  
 FEELINGS BY  
 FORGETTING OR BEING  
 LATE SO THE OTHER  
 PERSON NEEDS TO READ  
 BETWEEN THE LINES.

## Assertiveness and Communication



### “Communication Style”

Knowing your personal tendencies in communication style gives you the power to have some influence over your typical way of communicating. You can change the way you communicate.

### Styles of Communication

Communication typically not simply either passive or aggressive. Given that it is not black and white, it should be considered as if on a continuum with aggressiveness and passivity on each extreme. Assertiveness lies in between the two.



### Assertive Style

Communicating assertively means being able to stand up for your own needs in a simple and direct manner. It does not attack or negate the needs of other people. You stand up for yourself and take responsibility for getting your needs met in a way that is beneficial for yourself and others. When you are being assertive most people will respect you for your honesty and directness. Here are some characteristics of an assertive style:

Sincere and clear voice	Firm voice	Open to listening to the other person	Good eye contact	“I” statements
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### Passive Style

Passiveness (also called submissiveness) is a communication style where you violate your own rights by not standing up for what you need, or expressing yourself by communicating your needs are less important than others’ needs. Because people don’t know what your wants or feelings are, they can’t respond in any way. This may lead you to feel unvalued by others and lead to feelings of worthlessness, guilt, anxiety and depression. Here are some characteristics of a passive style:

Apologizing inappropriately	Dismissing yourself “it really doesn’t matter”	Putting yourself down	Poor eye contact	Facial expression doesn’t match internal feelings
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## Styles of Communication cont'd

### Aggressiveness

Aggressiveness is a communication style that ensures your needs are being met but violates the rights and needs of other people. This can involve communicating in a demanding way, being hostile to others, and even threatening to others. Intimidation is often used by people with an aggressive communication style. Here are some examples



Blaming	Threatening	Gestures such as clenching fists	Staring the other person down
Sarcastic or condescending tone	Asking questions in a hostile manner	Intruding on a person's space	Being cold and withdrawn

### What is the payoff for different communication styles?

The payoff you get			The price you pay		
Passive	Assertive	Aggressive	Passive	Assertive	Aggressive
-praise for being a good sport -being protected and looked after by others	-being able to see, hear, and love others more easily -getting your needs met -confidence	-you feel powerful and less vulnerable -you often get what you want -people leave you alone	-people can make too many demands of you -a build-up of stress and anger make you depressed	-there is no guarantee of outcome -sometimes others are uncomfortable with direct talk	-people feel resentful about you -loneliness -trouble in relationships at home and work

### What is your primary communication style?

Think about yourself and some of your experiences. Ask yourself how you may have learned your style of communication.

How did your family and friends teach you to deal with conflict?

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In what ways did you learn to get what you wanted without directly asking for it? Examples could include yelling, crying, making threats, etc.

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Do you still use these ways today?

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What is the price and pay off for your use of communication?

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HOW YOU COMMUNICATE YOUR IDEAS AND FEELINGS CAN BE AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN HOW YOU FEEL.

ACTUALLY STARTING TO ACT ASSERTIVE, EVEN THOUGH YOU MAY NOT FEEL ASSERTIVE INSIDE, WILL MAKE YOU FEEL STRONGER AND MORE CONFIDENT. THE MORE YOU ACT ASSERTIVE THE HEALTHIER YOU BECOME.



# Assertiveness and Communication

## Becoming more assertive

Being assertive is more than talking about your needs and wants. In order to be assertive it is also important to recognize your thoughts and feelings. If you are not clear about what you are feeling and what you want/don't want then it can be difficult to act assertively. If you are not sure about what you want or need then take the time to talk to someone.

Acting assertively can be learned. There are many skills and techniques that you can practice so that you increase your own assertive behaviour. First, try practicing in a neutral and safe environment. As you become more confident and skilled then begin to use these new skills in a more difficult or challenging environment or situation. Be patient; it takes time to learn new skills. If you make a mistake, think about what went right and wrong, how you might do it differently next time, and try again.

1. *Pick a situation in which you want to be more assertive.* Think about how you normally react to these situations and what you normally do or say to people. For example, is this a situation that you tend to react in a passive or aggressive manner?

Situation: Monica always cancels our Friday morning coffee time

Reaction: I pout and sulk; I avoid calling Monica; I avoid answering the phone

when she calls. I act in a passive-aggressive manner

2. *Identify the unhelpful thoughts that you have associated with these situations.*

Usually there are thoughts that we have that get in the way of acting in an assertive manner in these situations. For example, you might think that friends and family will dislike you if you do not do what they want you to do.

Try to identify these unhelpful thoughts and the emotions that are tied to the thoughts. It is more helpful to write this down, rather than trying to remember and process everything in your head.

Unhelpful Example: She's ditching me to spend time with her other friends; she only wants to see me if she has nothing better to do; she doesn't really like me

Develop some new and assertive ways of thinking about the situation.

In a separate column, right down assertive ways of thinking about the situation.

Helpful Example: Monica works really late on Thursday and it is difficult for her to make commitments on Friday morning; Monica has many family commitments; Monica's children may be home from school today

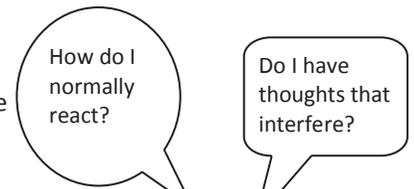
3. *Identify the unhelpful behaviours that you used in the past.* Remember to think about both verbal and non-verbal behaviours.

Example: I cheerfully say "that's okay" on the phone to Monica and quickly make an excuse to hang-up; I stomp around the house; I lay on the couch and watch TV infomercials.

4. *Develop a behaviour that is more helpful*

Think of your verbal and non-verbal behaviour.

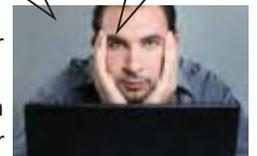
Example: I tell Monica that I am disappointed and was really looking forward to our coffee time. I ask Monica if another time (or a different activity) that would work better for her.



5. *Practice and rehearse the new behaviour, and develop a new script.*

Before practicing the behaviour, write down what you will do and say. Remember, practicing the behaviour is very helpful.

Take one of the situations you identified and apply your new knowledge. Then try out what you have been practicing. It can be helpful to try this out in a safe environment first, consider role-playing with a friend or spouse.



6. *Give yourself praise.*

Give yourself praise for doing the task and think about what went well. Then, think about how you would like to adjust it for the next time and write down what you want to improve. Be kind to yourself when you think of how you want to adjust the task and remember that all new behaviours require practice and patience.. Keep practicing..