



# Assertiveness

“In a Nutshell”

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If you lack confidence and find it difficult to speak up for yourself - to be assertive - you may find that your feelings, your needs and your wants are often dismissed or rarely met.

**If you are too passive and find it difficult to be assertive you may:**

- Be constantly doing things to please other people.
- Feel under pressure to agree with other people.
- Feel under pressure to do what other people want you to do.
- Feel forced to go places you don't want to go.
- Allow others to constantly criticise you and put you down.
- Allow others to abuse you.
- Come off worse in arguments.
- Feel bad if you have a difference of opinion.
- Feel you are letting others down if you don't do what they want.
- Make excuses and constantly justify yourself to others.
- Allow others to make you feel inferior and worthless.
- Have difficulty in saying 'no'.

Being assertive is having confidence in yourself to state clearly and honestly about what you want, what you need, what you feel. You respect and value yourself as well as other people. It is different from being aggressive. Aggressive people hurt, intimidate and bully others and have little respect for other people. Being assertive makes you feel good about yourself and about the way you treat others and can sometimes mean:

- You get your needs and wants met.
- Your feelings and opinions can be heard.
- Speaking clearly and firmly.
- Not allowing others to pressurise, bully or intimidate you into changing your opinion.
- Being able to give and accept compliments.
- Compromising at times.
- Feeling confident enough in yourself not to take to heart others criticism, put downs, nastiness.
- Being *YOU* - not changing who you are to please others.

If you are not used to being assertive it takes time and practice to learn this and is something you need to practice on a daily basis. There are also classes on assertiveness/confidence building, which are often run by local colleges and adult education centres. The Internet also has details of many companies who run classes on this subject. (Just put 'Assertiveness' in the search engine).

When you start being assertive you may find that others around you do not like it and may find it difficult to accept the 'new' you, - someone who can stand up for themselves. They may have been used to you not speaking up for yourself and pushing you around or putting pressure on you to do what they have wanted for many years. Do not let this put you off - continue being assertive and eventually they will accept the 'new' you and if they do not like it that is *their* problem - *not yours!* You do not need to feel guilty about stating what you want, need, and feel in an honest and clear way.

If you do not want to do something or go somewhere you do not have to justify yourself to others and/or go into numerous explanations and make up loads of excuses. You normally find that if you repeat what you say at least 3 times that the other person will give up.

For example, if your friend asks you to go to a party and you do not want to go say politely '*sorry I can't make it that night*'. If your friend keeps asking you why not, or starts putting pressure on you to go – do not

go into reasons why you cannot or do not want to go - just repeat '*sorry I can't make it that night*' and if your friend continues pressurising you repeat again '*sorry I can't make it that night*' - if she continues then you can say something like '*you're not listening to me, I have said I can't make it that night*' - then end the conversation.

Some people get dragged into arguments and when they come away from the person they feel pressurised, tired, upset they have not been heard etc. Sometimes they waste so much time and energy going round in circles, making up endless excuses, constantly justifying themselves that all that energy could have been used by doing something positive and doing something to enjoy yourself instead of wasting your time arguing with someone who does not want to hear you - you could spend hours and hours trying to reason with someone but if they do not want to hear you it is pointless and a complete waste of time.

There are people who are passive who allow others to be abusive to them - if someone for example rings you up and starts arguing with you and being abusive say something like '*I don't think there is any point us talking until you have calmed down so I am going to end the call now*' (and put the phone down!). That way you have stayed in control, you will feel good about yourself and you have not allowed anyone to abuse you. You have not been rude - you have just got the message across that you are not going to stay on the end of the phone while someone shouts and abuses you. Similarly if you are face to face with someone - walk away.

If you start treating yourself with respect and valuing yourself you should find that other people should start to show you respect and value you. At the end of the day you only need to be around and have positive, caring, respectful people in your life - people who are disrespectful, aggressive, selfish, uncaring etc. are people you are better off without. Be positive and caring towards yourself and you should draw positive and caring people towards you, if you are uncaring and negative about yourself you will put up with uncaring and negative people in your life.

If someone is nasty to you remember it is only their opinion - say to yourself '*no matter what you say or do to me I am still a worthwhile person*' – do not allow others to devalue you and make you feel worthless.

It is common for people who do not value themselves to constantly put themselves down and criticise themselves - try to love yourself unconditionally - nobody can be perfect and nobody needs to be perfect - everyone has faults, bad habits, things they may not like about themselves but that don't make them a bad person or a worthless person.

You love other people close to you in spite of their faults. If your mum/ dad/ brother/ sister/ boyfriend/ girlfriend/ best friend etc. had faults or things which maybe got on your nerves - you would still love them just the same - so why be so hard on yourself! Learn to love yourself unconditionally as you would others.

Being assertive takes practice but it is well worth the practice, as it will make you feel a happier person who is more in control of their life. You will get some of your needs and wants met and your feelings heard.

#### **A bill of assertive rights:**

- I have the right to state my own needs and set my own priorities as a person.
- I have the right to be treated with respect as an intelligent, capable human being.
- I have the right to express my feelings.
- I have the right to say 'yes' or 'no' for myself and say 'no' without feeling guilty.
- I have the right to change my mind.
- I have the right to say 'I do not understand'.
- I have the right to ask for what I want.
- I have the right to decline responsibility for other people's problems.