

# Assertiveness: a clear and confident form of communication.

Sometimes communication is frustrating because we are not being assertive or we feel the other person is being unfair or difficult. Assertiveness is very good way of getting across your message from a position of respect for your self and others. It improves communication in a relationship and helps you to have more confidence.

## Differences in communication

Psychologists have identified 4 different types of communication.

\*Aggressive communication is where a person stands up for their own views at the expense of other people. It generally leads to an escalation of angry responses and later can lead to feelings of shame. Its motto is: I win, you lose. Its method is name calling, pointing the finger, insulting, threatening, bringing it up old issues, arguing without listening, blaming, yelling, swearing, shouting and any kind of violence.

\*Submissive communication is where a person puts other people's views ahead of their own. It generally leads to frustration, loss of self-esteem, and resentment. Its motto is: Your ok but I'm not okay. Its method is not telling others what you really think, going along with things when you don't want to, being nice when you are angry, allowing others to put you down without protest, not making eye contact because of fear of rejection, not putting your best interests forward, not protecting yourself from abuse or violence.

\*Manipulative or indirect communication is where the communication is tricky or deceptive. It is designed to achieve an end in a concealed way and stymies people so that they feel upset or angry but can't identify the reason. Its motto is: I didn't really say that, you can't catch me. Its method includes trying to make you feel guilty, sarcasm, false praise, malicious gossip, using other people to make a person feel bad, giving the cold shoulder, pretending to be nice while really being mean, and threatening to self-harm.

\*Assertive communication is direct, honest and respectful of both speaker and listener. It aims to make communication clearer and assumes that each person is free to choose their own view. Its motto is: I'm ok, your ok. Its method is to acknowledge the other person's right to have a different opinion while retaining the right to one's own opinion. The methods are outlined in the section below.

## Methods of Assertiveness

### 1. Body language

We are reading each other's body language all the time. To get your message across in an assertive way,

- give eye contact,
- be aware of the message in your tone of voice
- allow silences into the conversation.

## 2. Using “I-statements”.

When you give your opinion, start the sentence with “I” and follow with a verb. I feel . . . I think . . . I want . . . I need . . . I’m . . . Own what you are saying.

- If you start the sentence with “You . . .”, it tends to be accusatory. Compare . . .  
“You always do that, you stupid idiot”.  
with  
“I get really annoyed when you do that and I wish you would think it through more carefully.”

- I-statements also give confidence. Compare . . .  
“Ok. I’ll try to fit it in”  
with  
“I don’t think I can fit that in - I already have too much. Is there an alternative option?”

## 3. Active listening.

When the other person speaks, acknowledge what they say, so they know you heard. Respect goes both ways.

- “What you seem to be saying is . . .”
- “I understand that you feel . . .”
- “I can see how our opinions are different . . .”
- “I agree with you about . . .”

## 4. Broken record

If you want something understood or to take a firm stance, or you feel that other people are not listening, you may need to use the broken record approach. Acknowledge the other person’s view but come back again and again to your main message. This has three parts:

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| a. Acknowledgement               | b. Standing firm                       |
| “I understand . . .              | . . . and I still want . . .”          |
| “I see where you are coming from | . . . but I have decided not to . . .” |

And c. Repetition

“I understand you want the lolly but I’m not going to buy it.  
I hear what you say but I think you had enough lollies. And I’m not going to buy it.  
Yes it does seem like a good lolly but I am not going to get it.  
I’d rather you didn’t keep asking me because I am not going to buy it and I’d like to think about other things.”

## 5. Fogging

Fogging is a way to deal with criticism. Remember you don’t have to accept or agree with criticism. Criticism, whether or not its warranted, tends to make us feel bad. Ultimately, we are the judge of our own behaviour.

Fogging allows you to deflect the barb of the criticism so that it does not hurt you. It avoids being hooked into argument and acknowledges without accepting or denying the criticism.

- “I can see that you might think that.”
- “I hear what you say”.
- “Its something to consider”.

“I understand you have that view.”

“I get where you are coming from”.

Alternatively, you might choose to engage with the criticism, still recognising that its their view and not necessarily yours. This can be helpful in flushing out people who are posing at your expense, or in getting to a real issue with someone close.

“What’s wrong with it?”

“What is it that bothers you?”

“Tell me more . . .”

Don’t fog everything. Sometimes you want the other person to know that you agree or disagree. I-statements help to minimise bad feelings.

“Yes, I did make a mistake there. I noticed that too”.

“I don’t really agree with your criticism. I think I did that job reasonably well”.

## 6. Accepting Praise

Strangely, accepting praise from others can be a hard thing to do. Denying it (“what this old rag?”) or feeling obligated by it, is destructive to the intended message. Praise is a wonderful boost to self-esteem and a way of bonding between people. Next time somebody praises you, accept it like a gift: “Thank you, nice of you to say so”.

But what if its false praise? What if the person is only praising you in order to persuade you. By now, you have the mechanics of assertiveness. Trying working out a response to false praise, with the skills you have learnt: body language, I-statements, active listening, broken record, fogging, accepting praise.

## Your bill of assertive rights

In assertiveness, we take the position that each person has certain basic rights. We can list these - its not an exhaustive list - you may wish to add to it. But do you agree with it?

Do you think you have the right to . . .

- make mistakes
- change your mind
- offer no reasons or excuses for your behaviour
- make your own choices
- not have to solve other people’s problems
- say no without feeling guilty
- offer constructive criticism
- tell someone you don’t understand their position, and you don’t care
- not have to depend on approval
- express your feelings and opinions
- be listened to by others
- disagree with others
- have different needs, wants, wishes from others
- be safe from violence or threat of violence
- Other .....
- .....
- .....