

Assertive Behaviour: Ideas to Keep in Mind

1. Assertive behavior is sometimes confused with aggressive behavior; however, assertion does not involve intentionally hurting the other person physically or emotionally although some emotional hurt may result.
2. Assertive behavior assumes that you have a right to express your own wants, needs, feelings, and ideas.
3. Remember: Other individuals have a right to respond to your assertiveness with their own wants, needs, feelings and ideas.
4. Assertive behavior aims at equalizing the balance of power, not in “winning the battle” by putting the other person down or rendering him/her helpless. An assertive encounter may involve negotiating an agreeable compromise.
5. By behaving assertively, you open the way for honest relationships with others. In contrast, aggressive or unassertive behavior may limit this potential.
6. Anger can be expressed assertively without humiliating the other person. Angry feelings should be expressed as soon after the incident as possible to avoid an aggressive reaction resulting from a build-up of angry emotion.
7. You have the right to take time or ask for time to formulate an assertive response to a particular situation.
8. Assertive behavior is a skill that can be learned and maintained by frequent practice.
9. Because assertive behavior is not only concerned with what you say but how you say it, it is important that assertive words be accompanied by assertive “body language” in order to make your message more clear and impactful. 80% of communication is non-verbal; make sure your non-verbal messages match your verbal messages (e.g. don’t smile when you are giving criticism). Listen actively to the other person. For example, give signal such as sounds like “mhm, uh-huh”, or facial expressions to inform the other person that you are tuned in.
10. Assertive body language includes the following:
 - a. Maintaining direct eye contact
 - b. Maintaining erect posture
 - c. Speaking clearly and audibly
 - d. Making sure you do not have a whiny or seductive quality to your voice
 - e. Making facial expressions to reinforce your words
 - f. Using gestures to add emphasis to what you say

Communication Tips

Poor communication can cause or add to relationship stress. To enhance communication with others, keeps these additional tips in mind:

1. Express thoughts, feelings and needs clearly and directly using “I feel” statements i.e. speak about yourself, not the other person e.g. “I’m feeling attacked and put down,” rather than “You’re wrong! I hate when you criticize and nag me!”
2. Don’t make assumptions
 - a. Ask the listener to convey back to you their understanding of the message you sent i.e. ask for feedback. This gives you a chance to correct misperceptions.
 - b. As a listener check to be sure you have correctly understood the message sent to you. Repeat the message in your own words and/or ask questions to clarify things you don’t understand.
3. Don’t interrupt the other person or finish sentences.
4. When possible, plan what you want to say before you say it.
5. Think about the timing of your message – is it a good time or will the other person be pre-occupied so that the message “falls on deaf ears”.
6. Use empathy. Put yourself in the other person’s shoes and try to see the world through his or her eyes.
 - a. Thought empathy: Paraphrase the other person’s words
 - b. Feeling empathy: Acknowledge how the other person is probably feeling, given what they are saying to you.
7. Inquire/explore: Ask gentle, probing questions to learn more about what the other person is thinking and feeling.