

## Assertiveness

Assertiveness is grounded in self-respect for whoever you are and whatever you **can** and **can't** do. It means honouring your personal values and integrity. It entails being self-validating rather than needing the approval of others and being secure in your self, even if some of your personal characteristics do not meet the approval of others. It is undermined by self-doubt, fear, guilt, shame and blame. For these reasons if you lack confidence, have poor self-esteem or have unresolved material from your past, these will usually need to be addressed first.

This information here may be useful to help you set personal goals at the start of therapy and once completed, assertiveness usually flows naturally with just a little coaching. Conversely, if one embarks on a course of assertiveness training while carrying emotional baggage it is unlikely to be a success.

### Main definition

Assertiveness means good, clear communication between you and others. It entails being heard AND actively listening so that the intended meanings are conveyed accurately. Assertive people aim to communicate with others in ways that leave little room for misunderstanding. Assertiveness has nothing to do with being able to win arguments or control others; it is a skill that empowers those around you so that the outcomes of discussion and communication are more likely to be productive and positive, or at the very least there is clarity. Some people say, "But what happens if two assertive people try to resolve a conflict"? The answer is that they very quickly acquire an accurate understanding of the other's position and can then start to negotiate and find solutions.

### Assertive elements

1. Making clear 'I' statements about how you feel and what you think. For example, "I feel very uncomfortable with this decision". "I think that it's a good idea to..."
2. Asking for what you want directly, rather than hoping someone will notice what you want or expecting them to mind read.
3. Knowing that you have the right to set clear boundaries in respect of your wishes about how others behave towards you.
4. Asking for clarification, rather than assuming or hoping that you've got it right.
5. Recognising and meeting your needs and wants independently of others, rather than what is expected of you in such roles as 'partner', 'employee', 'boss', 'doctor', 'builder' and so on.
6. Allowing yourself to make mistakes, knowing that sometimes you will and that is ok.
7. Allowing yourself to enjoy your successes, self-validating what you have done and sharing it with others in an inclusive, appropriate way.
8. Asking for 'thinking it over' time when someone makes a suggestion or proposal. This demonstrates your respect of the issue and a legitimate person will understand your right to do this.
9. Knowing that you are entitled to renegotiate and change your mind about any agreement if and when you want to.
10. Being assertive means taking responsibility for yourself, what you think, feel and do in any circumstance. For example, "**I feel** angry when you put me down" is assertive. "**You make me feel** angry when you put me down" is trying to place responsibility on the other person. It is weak, blaming and likely to generate a further attack or defensive response.

Assertiveness is being able to separate your feelings from the words and actions of others and own them thereby retaining your power. Not to do so gives your power away, often to the person who offended you, but the same correspondingly holds true for positive acts and statements: **“I feel loved** when you make time for us to be together”, is assertive. **“You make me feel loved...”** is weak and implies that the other person has control over your happiness... Simply letting another person know how you feel, (not how they make you feel), when they act in a certain way or say something is assertive feedback.

11. Recognising that we all have a responsibility **towards** others, rather than being responsible **for** them. This can be a very challenging concept to grasp, it means respecting the rights of other people to make what could be considered a poor decision.
12. Respecting other people and their right to be assertive.
13. Assertive people are considerate, polite and diplomatic; they choose optimum times and places to speak in order to give their statements the best opportunities to be heard clearly and to give the other person the same opportunities.
14. Knowing that you can choose not to be assertive if you like, weighing up and applying common sense to situations and circumstances.

(Based on: Annie Townend, Assertion Training - A Handbook for Those Involved in Training, published by the FPA Education Unit, 1985).

### **Summary:**

People who are assertive respect themselves and the people they deal with. They are able to accept their own positive and negative qualities and in so doing are able to be more authentic in their acceptance of others. They do not need to put others down in order to feel comfortable in themselves. They do not place responsibility for what happens to them onto others. They acknowledge that they are in charge of their actions, their choices and their lives. They don't need to make others feel guilty for failing to recognise their needs. Recognising their own needs enables them to ask openly and directly even though they risk disappointment. Their self-esteem is anchored deeply within themselves - They are not dependent on the approval of those around them. From this position of inner strength, they are able to respond sincerely to others.

I have the right to state my own needs and set my own priorities as a person, independently of my roles.

I have the right to be treated with respect.

I have the right to express my feelings.

I have the right to express my opinions and values.

I have the right to say, "yes" or "no" for myself.

I have the right to make mistakes.

I have the right to change my mind.

I have the right to say, "I don't understand". I

have the right to ask for what I want.

I have the right to decline responsibility for other people's problems.

I have the right to deal with others without being dependent on them for approval.

**I HAVE THE RIGHT TO SAY "NO" WITHOUT FEELING GUILTY**

A BILL OF ASSERTIVE RIGHTS ~ Adapted by DABS from "A WOMAN IN YOUR OWN RIGHT" by Anne Dickson. Published by Quartet Books, 1982. Copyright 1982 Anne Dickson.

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