

CHANGES MODULE 11: Assertiveness

What is it?

Assertiveness is the ability to honestly and openly express what we need and how we feel. Assertiveness involves respecting your own needs and needs of others equally or standing up for your personal rights in a way that doesn't ignore the rights of other people.

Benefits of being assertive

If you can master how to assert yourself you are more likely to get what you need. This can give you confidence about asserting yourself, creating a positive cycle. It also means you can focus more on creating your own personal goals instead of putting everyone else first. It can reduce conflict and create stronger relationships between yourself and others.

Assertive vs passive

Being passive is placing other people's needs above your own or not feeling able to communicate your needs. It can lead to:

- Feeling ignored and as if others are taking advantage of you.
- Feeling helpless and as if you have no control over your life.
- Feeling frustrated at yourself.

Assertive vs aggressive

At the other end of the scale, being aggressive involves disrespecting the needs of others in order to achieve your own. It can lead to:

- Difficulties in relationships because people feel disrespected and ignored.
- Increased conflict.
- Not getting your needs met because others feel less inclined to help you

In summary, the differences might be thought of like this:

Passive behaviour results in:
"I'm *not* OK, but you are OK"

Aggressive behaviour results in:
"I'm OK, and it doesn't matter if you're *not* OK"

Assertive behaviour results in:
"I'm OK *and* you're OK"

You may find that you fall into both passive or aggressive styles of communication based on different situations or relationships.

Tips for being more assertive

A) *Identify what you need*

It can take time to work out what you really want and need.

Listening to your feelings can help point the way - if something feels wrong, work on thinking about what would feel right.

B) *Express your own opinions and feelings.*

Look at the other person and keep a calm tone of voice, try to relax, be polite but firm. There's no need to apologise if you feel you are being reasonable.

Take ownership using "I". If you are unhappy about a situation, use "I" to say how you feel about it, such as "*I feel like I am doing too much at the moment*" instead of saying "*you never help me out*" which could come across as an attack.

C) *Learn to say "no" without feeling guilty.*

Many people find saying "no" really difficult. They may feel

guilty for saying no or find it easier to "cave in" to what others want rather than standing up for what they need.

Practising saying "no" is an important step in asserting yourself.

D) *Listen to others*

Part of being assertive involves listening and respecting other people's opinions. A simple way of showing you have listened is to repeat back in your own words what someone has said.

E) *Agree to disagree*

Remember that having a different point of view doesn't mean you are right and the other person is wrong.

F) *Start Small*

Practice assertiveness in situations you find less stressful. You can then build up to being assertive at times that might feel tougher for you.

Discussion Options

1. Do you think you are assertive?
2. When might you want to be assertive?
3. What barriers do people face to being assertive?

Further Resources:

"How to be assertive" www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/Assertiveness.asp

I'm OK - You're OK by Thomas A. Harris