

# Assertive Communication

## WHAT IS ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION?

Assertive communication is characterized by an ability to listen to the perspective of others and express oneself honestly and respectfully. It involves stating requests or ideas clearly and with confidence, without feeling guilty or apologizing. Assertive communicators are self-aware (i.e. know their own feelings, goals, etc.), responsible (for their own thoughts, behaviour, etc.) and honest (i.e. provide consistent verbal and non-verbal messages).

## WHAT DOES LEARNING TO BE MORE ASSERTIVE INVOLVE?

The following may suggest a need for more assertiveness: feeling disrespected, difficulty in taking action to achieve your goals, attempting to get what you want by trying to make others feel guilty, and feelings of resentment and helplessness.

Learning to communicate more effectively often involves better identifying and accepting your own feelings and needs, recognizing your rights, developing verbal and nonverbal assertiveness skills and practising (on paper, with a friend, "for real") assertive communication.

## HOW DO I COMMUNICATE?

	PASSIVE	ASSERTIVE	AGGRESSIVE
Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allow other to choose</li> <li>Emotionally dishonest</li> <li>Indirect</li> <li>Self-denying</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Choose for self</li> <li>Tactfully honest</li> <li>Direct</li> <li>Self-respecting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Choose for others</li> <li>Tactlessly honest</li> <li>"Too direct"</li> <li>Self-enhancing</li> </ul>
Goal of Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To avoid conflict</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To express needs and feelings without guilt</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To dominate</li> </ul>
Body Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Avoid eye contact</li> <li>Hunched shoulders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain eye contact</li> <li>Relaxed posture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staring</li> <li>Finger pointing</li> </ul>
Voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overly soft</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Firm</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Loud</li> </ul>
Feelings during communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Anxious</li> <li>Ignored</li> <li>Angry at self</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Confident</li> <li>Goal oriented</li> <li>Self-respecting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Righteous</li> <li>Controlling</li> <li>Guilty</li> </ul>
Others' feelings during communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Guilty</li> <li>Superior</li> <li>Frustrated with you</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Respectful</li> <li>Heard</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Humiliated</li> <li>Angry</li> <li>Distrustful</li> </ul>
Others' view of you	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of respect</li> <li>Distrustful</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Respectful</li> <li>Trusting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Angry</li> <li>Distrustful</li> </ul>
Potential outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Your rights are violated</li> <li>Others achieve their goals</li> <li>You do not achieve your goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Your rights are respected</li> <li>Others rights are respected</li> <li>Outcome negotiated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Others rights are violated</li> <li>Others don't achieve their goals</li> <li>You achieve your goals</li> </ul>
Underlying Beliefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>People should not be displeased with me</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I'm responsible for my needs</li> <li>I respect others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I have to dominate to protect myself</li> </ul>

Adapted from Neidhardt, Weinstein & Conry (1990)



Learning to communicate more effectively often involves better identifying and accepting your own feelings and needs, recognizing your rights, developing verbal and nonverbal assertiveness skills and practicing (on paper, with a friend, "for real") assertive communication.

## HOW SHOULD I PREPARE FOR ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION?

- Determine the problem (e.g. "I need help cleaning the apartment")
- Determine how you feel about the problem (e.g. tired, annoyed more help hasn't been given)
- Determine your rights (e.g. right to have roommate help clean the apartment)
- Determine what you want (e.g. roommate to do her own dishes, clean bathroom every second week, dust weekly)
- Designate a time to assert yourself (e.g. "I'll talk to my roommate tonight at supper")
- Practise asserting yourself (e.g. "I'm feeling tired of housework and would like more help. Can you,,")
- Assert yourself by stating the problem, your feelings, what you want and the consequences (e.g. "I'm feeling tired of housework and would appreciate more help. I'd really like to see us work something out. It would work for me if you could do your own dishes, clean the bathroom every second week and dust the apartment weekly. I'll do my dishes, clean the bathroom every other week and vacuum...What do you think?...It's too hard to live here and focus on studying if I have to do all the housework. I'll have to find another apartment if we can't work something out.")

## HOW CAN I COMMUNICATE MORE EFFECTIVELY?

- Use "I" statements (e.g. I think/feel/need/would like/want/would appreciate...). Be specific about exactly what you want. Requests, not demands, work better.
- Use "you" statements to express empathy (e.g. "You seem tired."), not to blame or judge ("You're lazy.").
- Stay on topic. Letting the conversation get sidetracked delays resolution.
- State problems in terms of their impact on you (e.g. "I felt sad when you forgot my birthday."). "You" statements (e.g. "You forgot my birthday.") can often result in a defensive response.
- "We" responses suggest a willingness to negotiate and be involved in creating a solution (e.g. "We could brainstorm about this issue.").
- When someone responds to an assertive request with very intense emotion, it is sometimes helpful to delay further discussion (e.g. "I can see that you're very upset. Let's talk about this after supper.").
- Facilitate further discussion by acknowledging the other person's point of view, even if you don't agree with it (e.g. "I can see how you might think that I'm being stubborn.").
- Be aware of your body language. Look people in the eye and assume an "open posture."
- Avoid apologizing for your request; it waters down your message.

## WHERE CAN I RECEIVE HELP?

If you think you may be experiencing problems with assertiveness that require professional assistance, call Student Counselling Services at 966-4920.

Neidhardt E., Weinstein, M., & Conry, R. (1990). No-gimmick Guide to Managing Stress. Vancouver: Self-Counsel Press Ltd.