

The business of Assertiveness

The word assertiveness is used to describe a certain kind of behaviour. It is behaviour that helps us to communicate clearly and confidently our NEEDS, WANTS and FEELINGS to other people without abusing in any way their human rights. It is an alternative to passive, aggressive and manipulative behaviour. Therefore if we believe this is the correct way to treat others it is reasonable that we should expect to be treated in the same way - therefore assertiveness is also about claiming our own 'human rights'.

If we want to be assertive we must

- Decide what we want.
- Decide if it is fair.
- Ask clearly for it.
- Value our selves as important.
- Be calm and be relaxed.
- Express our feelings openly and without guilt or embarrassment.
- Take appropriate risks to assert our rights.
- Give and take compliments easily
- Give and take criticism.

We must not:

- Act aggressively
- Beat about the bush.
- Go behind people's backs
- Shout or bully.
- Call people names.
- Bottle up our feelings.
- Accept bullying.
- Take unnecessary risks to prove a point.
- Avoid **WIN – LOSE** and aspire to **WIN-WIN**

Fundamental Assertive Skills:

Persistence – Most unassertive people take 'no' for an answer far too easily, this can undermine your rights – be clear whether you have a right to something – including respect - and ask for it repeatedly using the -

- **Broken Record Method** – the skills to repeat over and over again, in an assertive and relaxed manner, what it is you want or need, until the other person recognises your right to be treated with respect and in a dignified manner and begins to negotiate with you.

- **Negotiation** – the art of negotiation like so many other assertive skills is becoming a profession in its own right. But, we do not need sophisticated training in diplomacy to negotiate solutions. What we need is tact, forethought, clarity, diplomacy, understanding, empathy and being aware of the bigger picture, will help.

- **Empathy** – try to understand what it might feel like to be in their shoes. If the other person is showing any feeling acknowledge that you are aware of it – for example – I can see/appreciate that this is really important to you – I can appreciate that you might be upset/angry/hurt/scared. Ask for clarification and make sure that you do not make assumptions ask –

- **Open question** – how are you feeling? What does that feel like? Can you tell me what you are thinking? Can you tell me what has made you so angry?

- **Active listening** – I think what I hear is I think what you might be feeling is..... is that right - I think what you just said is..... Reflect back and repeat what has been said so that the other person knows that you are listening and taking them seriously. Take notes, write the points down as you are listening if that helps you to feel more comfortable, this can help

create a sense that you are taking someone seriously and respecting their rights but try to give regular –

- **Eye contact** – As this can create a sense of being listened to – respected – taken seriously BUT do not eyeball someone or appear to stare them out.
- **Fogging** - Fogging consists of finding some limited truth to agree with in what an antagonist is saying. More specifically, one can *agree in part* or *agree in principle*.
- **Negative inquiry** - Negative inquiry consists of requesting further, more specific criticism – take .
- **Negative assertion** - Negative assertion is agreement with criticism without letting up demand.
- **I-statements** – ‘I’ statements can be used to voice one's feelings and wishes from a personal position without expressing a judgment about the other person or blaming one's feelings on them.

REMEMBER,

Do not use a put down – Be respectful and be aware of the language you use.

Do not dismiss – Remember empathy and appreciation - if you do not understand ask for clarification or explain why you have difficulty understanding.

Do not patronise – Allow other people to think and feel and be clear why you disagree, or be genuinely sympathetic not false.

Keep calm – If possible use relaxation techniques to help you prepare for a situation you know will be tricky always –

Do not put yourself at risk, if someone is being aggressive and you feel threatened - assert your right to withdraw and look after yourself.

Prepare and do not jump in on impulse – Think about your tactics, write a 'crib sheet' – take time out – check you have got it right – think before you speak.

Keep to the point – Do not get side tracked or panic. If you are not sure remove yourself and/or take time to find the answer. Always remember your own human rights, look after yourself and remember you have the right to be treated with respect including not being forced into making unreasonable promises or decisions because you are being threatened.

Win – Win NOT win – lose – This might be as simple as reaching a point where you accept a persons feelings and emotions rather than dismissing them – acknowledging another person in the world – or -

Reaching or Offering a compromise – if appropriate – or -

Saying sorry – You should mean it but don't over do it and don't keep repeating it – do not become the victim but respect another person's right to be acknowledged particularly if you **are** wrong.

Accepting compliments – You should say 'Thank you', accept the compliment and do not turn it in to a 'self put down'.

Treat others' as you wish to be treated – and expect to be treated as you would treat others'.

Based on, 'Assert yourself, How to re-programme your mind for positive action', by Gail Lindenfield.