



Being More Assertive

How to Fly your flag without losing your rag or feeling like a wimp!

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On this course you will:

- Be able to understand how to exert more control in situations that are important
- Be able to resist the pressure of dominant/aggressive people.

You will also ...

- Find out about the difference between passive, aggressive and assertive behaviour.
- Discover the Rules of Assertion and how you can put them into practice.
- Practice assertive techniques in your own life.

SECTION 1

What is assertiveness?

Assertiveness is being able to stand up for yourself, making sure your opinions and feelings are considered and not letting other people always get their way. It is **not** the same as aggressiveness. You can be assertive without being forceful or rude. Instead, it is stating clearly what you expect and insisting that your rights are considered.

Assertion is a skill that can be learnt. It is a way of communicating and behaving with others that helps the person to become more confident and aware of themselves.

At some time in each of our lives, however confident we are, we will find it difficult to deal with certain situations we encounter. Examples of these could be:

- Speaking to your manager.
- Asking someone to return something they have borrowed.
- Dealing with difficult co-worker.
- Communicating our feelings to our friends, family or partner.

Often in life we deal with these situations by losing our temper, by saying nothing or by giving in. This may leave us feeling unhappy, angry, out of control and it will rarely actually solve the problem. This tendency that many people have to react in either an unassertive or an aggressive way may become even more of a problem if they become depressed. The loss of confidence and self-worth that is common in depression may make the person more likely to **give in** to everyone around them, or in contrast become **very irritable** towards those around them. Both responses are unhelpful because they are likely to worsen how you feel (by being frustrated at yourself and others), and add to your problems.

Where does assertiveness come from?

As we grow up we learn to adapt our behaviour as a result of the things that happen to us. We model ourselves upon those around us, for example parents, teachers and our friends, and other influences such as television and magazines. If during this time our self confidence is eroded, for example through being bullied or ridiculed at school or criticised within the family, then in our adult lives we may be more likely to react passively or aggressively in similar situations.

Although a person may have learned to react passively or aggressively in life, they can

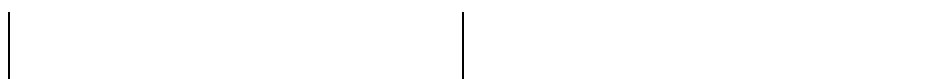
change and learn to become more assertive. You will now look at the effects of acting in an *aggressive* or a *passive* way, and then contrast this with the impact of *assertion*.

The Assertiveness Continuum

The times when we most need to remain assertive are probably those when there is a danger of emotion, in particular the emotion of anger overtaking us.

For example there are many situations where a person does or says something which we may find annoying or strongly disagree with, and we have to decide whether to confront them or not. We have nearly all thought at some time after such an event “I wish I had told them...” or “I should have said...” but do we actually confront them? Alternatively there may be situation where you do attempt to confront them but either you find that your message becomes confused and weakened or the whole thing escalates and becomes emotional.

It is interesting, though, to note that everyone has a tendency to react in difficult situations in a particular way across a range of behaviour, the illustration below illustrates the “**assertiveness continuum**” ... take a moment and mark your over type of behaviour using H for home and W for work



Passive

Assertive

Aggressive

It should be recognised that very few people are actually operating at the extremes all the time and those that are will tend to suffer from social and possibly even serious psychological problems.

PASSIVE BEHAVIOUR

Elements of passive behaviour

Passive behaviour is **not** expressing your *feelings, needs, rights and opinions*. Instead there is an over-consideration for other's feelings, needs, rights and opinions.

Feelings: Bottling up your own feelings or expressing them in indirect or unhelpful ways.

Needs: Regarding the other person's needs as **more important** than your own. Giving in to them all the time.

Rights: The other person has rights but you do not allow yourself the same privilege.

Opinions: You see yourself as having little or nothing to contribute and the other person as always right. You may be frightened to say what you think in case your beliefs are ridiculed.

The aim of passive behaviour is to **avoid conflict** at all times and to **please others**.

Effects of passive behaviour.

On you: short-term

- Reduction of anxiety.
- Avoidance of guilt.
- Martyrdom.

On you: long-term

- Continuing loss of self-esteem.
- Increased internal tensions leading to stress, anger and worsened depression.

There are immediate positive effects of being passive but the longer lasting effects may be detrimental to your own health and cause others to become increasingly irritated by you and to develop a lack of respect for you.

AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR

Elements of aggressive behaviour.

Aggression is the opposite of assertion. Aggression is expressing your own feelings, needs, rights and opinions with **no respect** for other people's feelings, needs, rights and opinions.

Feelings: Expressing your feelings in a demanding, angry and inappropriate way.

Needs: Your own needs are seen as being more important than others and theirs are ignored or dismissed.

Rights: Standing up for your own rights, but doing so in such a way that you violate the rights of other people.

Opinions: You see yourself as having something to contribute and see other people as having little or nothing to contribute.

The aim of aggression is to **win**, if necessary at the expense of others. Try to think of a time when someone else has been aggressive to you and ignored your opinions. How did it make you feel about them and yourself?

Effects of aggression

Aggression has both short-term and long-term consequences.

On you: Short-term

- Release of tension.
- The person feels more powerful.

On you: Long-term

- Feelings of guilt and shame.
- Place responsibility for anger onto others.
- Decreasing self-confidence and self-esteem.
- Resentment in those around the aggressive person.

Although the short-term effects may be rewarding, the longer lasting effects of using aggression may be less beneficial and cause problems for the person and others.

Your Text Here