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# Assertiveness



## How to Stand-up for Yourself

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## Understanding Assertiveness

The dictionary defines assertiveness as, "confidently self assured" a fairly good description of what most of us hope to be, confident and self assured. The question always becomes am I assertive? Am I too assertive? Am I assertive to the point of being aggressive? No one wants to be known as aggressive just as they do not want to be known as a push over. The goal is to find that fine line in between too much and too little assertiveness. Balance if you will, so that you know when to let go or when to give a little bit.

The study of assertiveness has a lot to do with how you establish personal boundaries for yourself and for others around you. Most people fall into three categories the first being passive where they let people overcome their personal boundaries. If you are one of these people you probably find yourself saying yes to things you do not want to do or letting others take credit for your work. Most of the time you fall into these traps because you are afraid to speak up for yourself. This sort of behavior leaves you feeling manipulated and abused. If you see yourself as the victim in many scenarios then you might be too passive.

The second type of person falls in that confidently self assured category. You are unlikely to let yourself be manipulated. However, you are also willing to take on extra work when necessary and let others have their way when it is appropriate. This type of person generally feels good about their decisions and in control of their own destiny.

A third type of person is assertive to the point of aggression. If you are unwilling to compromise or let another persons voice be heard you are likely viewed by others as aggressive. You might have a "my way or the highway" perspective on life. It is quite likely that your social circle consists of a few close friends who view you as the big dog and you like it that way. The problem with this personality is that no one person is right all the time. You probably take advantage of and manipulate others without realizing it.

The goal of falling into the middle of the assertiveness scale is that you will be more successful in life and have better personal and work relationships. Being

assertive simply means that you know how to express your feelings and how to assert your own rights while still being respectful of another persons rights. If you do this you will not have as much conflict with other people in your life. Both passive and aggressive people tend to live in a world that is filled with discord and drama. This is due to their inability to talk about their feelings and desires in a constructive way.

Some of the problems that come into play when we try to be more or less assertive have to do with social norms in our culture. Assertive woman are often thought to be overbearing or unpleasant while some men who are assertive to the point of aggressive are merely considered go getter's. Both of these depictions are damaging and difficult to overcome. Because these sort of opinions are so prevalent a female might be scared of becoming more assertive or as a male you might fear losing respect or status if you give in to the will of another.

The transition to an assertive person might be painful or scary. But, you will probably find that if you learn how to communicate your feelings properly people will be more receptive then you expected. For passive persons you might be surprised at how happy your spouse is when you decide which movie to see or where to go for dinner because it has taken the pressure off of them. Aggressive people will happily find that more people want to talk to them and share ideas because they are no longer scared of being disrespected for their opinions.

Both parties will find that they feel better because there is less conflict in their lives. Conflict leads to stress. Stress leads to a multitude of issues physically and mentally.

## Assertiveness – How to Stand-up for Yourself

Your blood pressure and heart rate are affected when there is a lot of stress in your life. You might overeat or drink too much as a way to quell the conflicting emotions you experience. Many of these issues are solved by simply owning your feelings and learning how to communicate them to others.

We say simply, but we all know that communication is a difficult skill to perfect. The thing to remember is that communication is a two way street. You get to say what you want and how you feel and you must allow others to do the same. Even in disagreements, proper communication can allow both parties to leave the conversation feeling successful.

## How Assertive Are You? 10 Questions To Find Out

- **Do you say yes even when you do not want to do something?** For example, are you the mom who always volunteers even when you know you do not have time to make three dozen cupcakes? Do you then stay up all night even though you are bone tired making said cupcakes all the while feeling resentful of the other moms who said no and cursing them under your frosting laden breath?
- **Are you indecisive?** Do you get to the point where weighing the pros and cons of a particular situation goes overboard and you just give up? When you make decisions do you find yourself considering every possible option and how it will effect everyone except you?
- **Do you feel guilty when you ask others for help?** Alternately do you expect others to just do things for you that you could easily do yourself and get angry with them if they refuse?
- **When you are shopping do you find yourself getting sucked in to a sales pitch to the point where you feel guilty walking away without making a purchase?** Even if you can not afford or do not want a particular item do you buy it just so the salesman will leave you alone?
- **What is your reaction if someone cuts you off in traffic or in front of you in line?** Do you blow up and yell, curse, or make rude gestures to them? Do you back off and turn your anger at them inward instead?
- **If someone disagrees with you do you make fun of them?** Do you assume that they are crazy or uneducated because their opinion is different from yours?
- **When you make mistakes do you admit them?** If you do not admit them is it because you are embarrassed or because you refuse to admit that you were wrong about something?

- **In your social circle are you the always the one who make plans or are you always following along whether the group is doing something you enjoy or not?**
- **When you must talk to people in authority positions do you feel nervous or anxious?**
- **When you receive a compliment does it make you feel proud or embarrassed?** How do you feel about giving someone a compliment?

The way that you answered the questions above have probably helped you to understand a little bit more about your assertiveness personality. You might have realized that you are passive in most situations and would like to change that behavior. Being assertive means getting the things that you want or doing the things that you want to do, with in reason, over the will of others.

Just the fact that you are taking the time to read about how to become more assertive is a step in the right direction. Being willing to help yourself become more assertive, and happier in turn, is a big step. Being comfortable and confident in the way you vocalize your opinions and desires can help you in each facet of your life. Whether you are looking to improve your communication skills at work, home, or with friends a little assertiveness goes a long way.

## Being Assertive At Work

There is a danger with assertiveness in the workplace on both sides of the coin. Those who are too passive run the risk of not getting their voices heard or having others receive credit for their work. A lack of assertiveness can be easily confused with laziness. On the flip side too much assertiveness in the workplace can make one seem unapproachable or worse, disliked among co workers. People who are too assertive often miss out on opportunities to learn from others because they never let anyone else voice their opinions.

Assertive people can be labeled aggressive if they do not handle themselves appropriately. To be assertive without being labeled aggressive you will have to learn how to communicate with your co workers, subordinates, and superiors in a non threatening yet still confident manner.

The first thing that you need to learn is how to respect all opinions, including your own. An assertive person does not assume that what they have to say does not matter or has probably been tried already.

An assertive person also allows others to feel this way by placing value on their ability and ideas. As a leader you should make yourself accessible to your employees in a sincere way. Almost all bosses say they have an open door policy but they do not all follow through on that idea in their words and actions.

Equally, as a subordinate you have to find the right tone to voice your ideas so your superior is confident it is worth listening to during their busy workday.

You have rights at work, everyone does, but not everyone asserts those rights in an effective manner. Those who do not wind up losing out on opportunities to move up and make more money.

Some of these rights include the right to be treated with respect, which as previously mentioned also means treating others with respect. You also have the right to a reasonable workload. This means you have the right to say no to extra work, especially that which does not come with extra pay.

Far too often in the workplace we find ourselves taking on a bigger load than is reasonable out of fear of being downsized. The problem of course is it leaves you feeling overloaded and resentful. Often, you will feel anger towards your superiors for giving you the extra work and toward your co-workers for not doing their fair share.

What you might not realize is that others are doing what is fair by being assertive and saying no to more than they can reasonably handle. A passive person might find that even when they do everything that is asked they are still skipped over for advancement. A co-worker who has assertive communication skills may be promoted instead.

### ***How to Assertively Communicate with Co-workers***

- Use the word "I" it shows that you are taking responsibility for your request and your actions.
- Use the word "no" directly so that there is no confusion about your intentions.
- Try to keep your explanation or apology short and sweet. Droning on and on is frustrating to others.
- Appreciate that your co-worker or superior may be upset that you refused extra work and say so.
- If possible, find an alternative plan and suggest it.
- Make sure that you repeat your refusal until the person you are speaking to acknowledges it, again ensuring that your feelings are clear.
- Be aware of your body language and make sure it tells the same story you are telling verbally.

## Assertiveness – How to Stand-up for Yourself

- When you have a conflict, resolve it amicably and make a plan to revisit the issue. Wait one or two days and talk again so that there are no negative feelings left hanging around.

The issue of refusing extra work or asking for something gets a bit muddled when one has to deal with their superiors. You might find yourself nervous at just the thought of talking to your boss, much less asking her for something.

Even if you feel you deserve a raise you might second guess yourself when the time comes to actually make the request. Some bosses want you to feel that way, to instil fear in you so it lightens their burden. However, a boss that respects you as an intelligent and valuable member of their team is more likely to want his employees to be comfortable.

### ***How to Talk to your Boss about Problems or Concerns***

- Decide which battles are worth fighting and when is the right time to fight them. Figure out what the real problem is or what you are trying to get.
- Maintain appropriate physical, mental, and emotional energy when it comes time for a meeting or discussion. Remember that your body language and tone are as important as the words you use.
- While you are confronting your boss be sure to maintain his or her status by speaking to them with respect. They earned respect so be sure to give it to them even if they do not see your point of view.
- If the problem you are addressing really boils down to a personality conflict you must be willing to accept the ramifications of your actions.

## Assertiveness – How to Stand-up for Yourself

More often than most of us realize, problems at work stem from a lack of assertiveness. Once you understand what rights you are entitled and how to communicate with others your workplace will be less stressful. Less conflict and less stress leads to increased productivity. If you can increase your productivity simply by removing negative elements in yourself others will follow. Before you know it that promotion you have been chasing will finally come your way.

## How to Say No and Be Assertive in Social Settings

You know her. The Alpha mom who does everything all of the time. She is PTA president, home room advisor, and soccer coach. She makes perfect cupcakes and her children are involved in every activity from piano lessons to little league.

What you might not realize is that she does not enjoy all of the endless activity. As a matter of fact she keeps promising her friends and her husband that she will learn to say no but each time volunteers are requested she finds herself begrudgingly signing up to help.

You might think that it takes a great deal of confidence to take on all of those activities, but often times that is not the case. Women are especially guilty of taking on more than they can handle when it concerns their social circle.

Sometimes people say yes too often because they fear no one else will step up and do things right. Other times it is because they are afraid of losing friends or respect if they say they can not help or have other commitments.

What you must remember if you are one of these people is that your time has value. When you overextend yourself you take your valuable time away from other things and then those things suffer. Time with your children or your spouse is usually the first casualty when someone can't learn to say no. Children grow resentful, marriages crumble, and stress rises for those who are overextended. In order to stop saying yes and get back to having time for yourself alone you need to learn when and how to use the word "no" appropriately.

## When to Say No

- 1. When you do not have time.** This may mean that you have to sit down and set up a time budget. Allow yourself a set number of hours per week for yourself, for your spouse, and for your children. Include on your budget time to eat, sleep, and do household tasks. It may seem silly but it gives you a guide to know how much time you have left for other activities. Then as your volunteer requests and time commitments get added fill in the spaces as needed. You can simply look at your time budget and see that you do not have enough hours left to paint the backdrop for the school play but maybe you have enough to help set up the refreshments. Just like a financial budget a time budget can keep you running in the black.
- 2. When you are asked to do something you truly do not enjoy.** This is especially true of volunteer opportunities. Everyone wants to help but the key is finding ways to help using skills that you have already. If the band booster club desperately needs a treasurer and you hate dealing with numbers and finance, say no. On the other hand if they need someone to head up the bake sale and you love to bake and organize events then you can say yes.
- 3. When you dislike the other volunteers.** This one sounds a little catty, but if an event you enjoy is going to be ruined because you do not get along with other participants then do not do it. You should spend your valuable time with people you enjoy. For example, you like doing classroom parties at your children's school but the person who heads up the committee is insufferable. Instead of putting up with her maybe you could volunteer for field trips, equally fun but much less stress.

If you know when you need to say no, the next step is learning how to say no. When you are dealing with social situations saying no with tact is extremely important. You should remember that by saying no you allow others to say yes. It is possible that there are others waiting in the wings to step up who are

capable of doing a task just as well as you. You can ease your guilt by thinking of your no as a way of letting someone else say yes.

### *How to Say "No" and Not Feel Guilty About it*

1. **Be honest.** It is tempting to make up crazy stories about sick relatives and absurd schedules when you refuse a request. In the end you will almost always be found out and the embarrassment over your little white lie could be tremendous. This does not mean hurting someone's feelings. Of course you can't say that you do not want to do holiday parties because little Timmy's mom makes your skin crawl. But you can say you would rather do something else or that you are not comfortable doing the parties this year. Honest, but not hurtful.
2. **Be kind.** When people ask for your assistance it is because they need help. The school, the team, the church, the local non profit are all in the same boat and it can be difficult to turn them down. When you do say no to them be gentle with your words. Let them know how much you respect what they are doing and give them your apologies. Then try not to feel too guilty as you shut the proverbial door.

### *Being Assertive in Social Settings*

When you are afraid to assert yourself in social settings you wind up spending a lot of time alone. Being assertive means being able to strike up a conversation with a stranger and knowing how to attract friends. Not being assertive is not the same as being shy.

A lot of people who consider themselves shy have plenty of friends and an active social life. It is possible to be both shy and assertive. Shy people eventually open up to friends and experiences. People who are not assertive lack the ability to do so.

To get past a lack of assertiveness you have to put yourself out there even if it makes you uncomfortable. It may mean joining clubs or groups that force

social interaction. If you play bridge, join a bridge group and go to their events with the intention of making friends.

Once you are there introduce yourself to others. Ask them about their interests and they will probably ask you about your interests. Don't simply give them one word answers, that is the fastest way to end a conversation.

You have to take control of your social life. If you seek out groups of like minded or interested people a group of friends will quickly follow. But you have to be open to the opportunity.

You can not expect others to include you in their events if you sit in a corner with your arms folded across your chest at every meeting. Be open to others, ask them about themselves, listen when they talk. The adage is true, in order to have a friend you first have to be one.

Once you feel comfortable and have had some pleasant interactions suggest an outing aside from the club. You will probably be surprised to find how many other people are looking for friends too.

## How to Raise Assertive Children

We teach our children all sorts of things. We teach them to be polite, to always say please and thank you. We teach them not to interrupt us or others when we are working or to be quiet when someone else is talking. We teach them to be nice to their siblings, to chew with their mouths closed, and to brush their teeth every day.

Do we take the time to teach them to be assertive? It can seem like a small thing, but when you see your own child being treated unfairly it breaks your heart. You might ask them why they did not stand up for themselves only to get a blank look in return. The answer is probably that they do not know how.

Imagine you watched your child playing happily in the sandbox at your favorite park. Pretty soon he is joined by other children and all seems to be going well. Then, you witness the moment when another child rips the sand shovel out of your sweet babe's hand and he does...nothing. He does not cry or get angry. He does not ask for his shovel back. He just sits and looks sad without his shovel.

The event makes you sad because you know that his feelings must be hurt. What might make you more sad is the realization that he just let himself get taken advantage of by way of a swiped shovel.

There are tools you can use to raise your child so that her or she is assertive and not aggressive. By raising them to be assertive you give them confidence in their own abilities. You give them faith in themselves and tools to deal with conflict.

## **10 Tips for Raising an Assertive Child**

- 1. Be assertive yourself.** Children model the behavior of their parents. If they grow up in a home where everyone feels comfortable expressing their feelings and desires your child will learn this behavior.
- 2. Let their voices be heard in family matters.** Hold family meetings and let them give input. Obviously, small children are not capable of deciding the family budget but they can assist in other ways. Maybe you sit down and come up with a weekly menu and allow them to make suggestions.
- 3. Make their opinions valid.** In holding those family meetings you sometimes will have to take their suggestions. It might mean hot dogs for dinner on Sunday or a trip to the park or a pet with a silly name but it allows them to know that their opinion is valid.
- 4. Follow through on discipline.** If you tell your child they will lose dessert if they do not eat their vegetables then you can not fold. Discipline is a building block for boundaries. A child who has boundaries is less likely to allow others to take advantage of him.
- 5. Use constructive criticism.** If your child kicks or hits you tell him, "stop kicking me it hurts mommy" instead of, "no, you're bad." Letting him know he is doing something wrong without hurting his feeling encourages him to be assertive.
- 6. Explain the rules.** Tell your child, "you have to eat your breakfast so you will feel good when you play later," is a much better answer then, "because." It allows your child to understand that the rules are not arbitrary.
- 7. Let your child make the rules sometimes.** If he only wants to wear orange, let him wear orange. As long as the rules he wants to follow are not detrimental to him or others let him follow them. This allows your child to learn about being in control of his own destiny.

8. **As your child gets older talk to him about being assertive.** Children of school age and slightly younger can understand how to stand up for themselves if you explain it in simple terms. Give them examples or do role playing games with them to help them understand.
9. **Watch out for their friends.** If you see them being bullied by another child try to move them to another play area. By the same token, when you find a friend whose relationship with your child is equally give and take work hard to foster that friendship.
10. **Listen to them.** As our children get older it is easy to think that they need us less. That is false, what they need as they get older is for their parents to be available when they are ready and willing to talk. Children who know their voice is heard at home grow up to be assertive adults.

He and she have been used interchangeably in the list above. As any parent knows boys and girls are not the same, especially as they get into the teen years.

### *Tips for Raising Assertive Girls*

- Give her the words to express how she feels. By talking about emotions around her she will feel free to use those words too. When your teenage girls says, "I'm fine" push a little to find out what that means to her.
- When she acts assertive at home commend that behavior. Make sure she knows that you respect her assertiveness and that she handled the situation correctly.
- Girls are notoriously hard on themselves. Make sure your daughter sees how wonderful she is by asking her to name her strengths during lighter moments not just when she is upset.

## ***Tips for Raising Assertive Boys***

- Be wary of them confusing aggression with assertiveness. Too often the boys will be boys mentality encourages unpleasant behavior. Give them the tools to treat others with respect.
- Try not to put too much stock into physical attributes. Boys who are smaller or less athletic have more risk of being passive. Encourage their strengths and do not criticize them for physical shortcomings.
- Encourage talking. Teenage boys can get awfully quiet around the house. Have meals together every night and get them to talk about their day. A child who feels closed off and unwilling to talk to you is probably talking to his peers instead, and they might not give the best advice.

Raising an assertive child will pay off as they get older. Comfortably confident children are less likely to bend to the will of their peers. They will be more apt to walk away from a bad situation or to keep up good grades even when it is not the cool thing to do.

If you give them the tools to value themselves and their opinions they will have high self esteem and it will show in the friends they choose and the activities they participate in.

That is not to say that they will not make mistakes because they will. But, you can be assured they will learn from those mistakes and feel comfortable coming home to talk about them.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, being assertive is about standing up for yourself. In order to stand up for yourself you have to know how to make your voice heard. The key to getting what you want is learning proper communication skills.

When you are at work you can learn to talk to the boss without getting nervous and to your co workers without fear of rejection. Never again will someone take credit for your work while you sit on your hands, too afraid to speak up. You will never leave work feeling angry and bitter that once again you missed out on a chance to shine.

Being assertive means knowing when you need to say no. It also means understanding that you do not have to do everything to be accepted nor do you have to be the one to do something just so that it gets done right. You will learn to budget your time so that the things you do are enjoyable and valuable to you. Your family will appreciate that you have time for them and you will also have time for yourself. You might be surprised that learning to say no to some things allows you to say yes to even better opportunities.

Finally, if you are assertive your children will learn to be assertive too. It might be the best thing you ever teach them. They will value themselves too much to get caught up in peer pressure and negative energy. They will not allow others to push them around. They will trust you because you are confident in yourself and confident in them. All of this you can give your children by teaching them to stand up for themselves and to communicate those feelings in a constructive manner.

Always keep in mind that being assertive is not about being aggressive. It is not about putting other people down or holding yourself to an unrealistic standard. Assertiveness is giving yourself permission to speak up, to say no when you need to, to be proud and confident in who you are and in your abilities. Confidently self assured is how you should feel when you walk into a room whether it is a board room or a lunch room. Be sure of yourself and others will have confidence in you.