

How to use assertiveness techniques in conversations

What is assertiveness?

- Open honest communication
- Feeling at ease in social situations
- Having the social skills that help you form closer personal relationships
- Being able to express your feelings, thoughts and emotions without experiencing a lot of anxiety or guilt and without violating the rights and dignity of others
- Taking responsibility for what happens to you in life, making your own decisions and free choices
- Being a friend to yourself and maintaining your own dignity and self respect
- Recognising that you have certain rights that need not be sacrificed
- Being able to protect yourself from being taken advantage of by others.

Assertiveness is a matter of degree. You can become more assertive than you are now by increasing your understanding of what assertiveness is and by practicing assertive communication techniques.

Assertiveness techniques

There are a number of techniques that can be used to develop more assertive communication and behaviour:

- Basic stance
- Level statements
- Saying no when you mean no
- Repeating

Basic Stance

This is about being precise, succinct and direct about what you want.

I'm feeling hot. I'd like the window opened.

is more direct than

Is anybody feeling too warm in here?

The second statement suggests that you are not confident enough to ask for exactly what you want unless you are sure that other people want the same thing. The answer to the second question could be "No" and then what do you do? Sulk? Feel rejected? Put up with being hot? The first statement is clear and more likely to get a response that you want or can negotiate.

Level Statements

The purpose of a level statement is to make a clear, open statement about your experience of an event, incident or behaviour in a way that another person can understand and respond to. The structure of a level statement is as follows.

When you

(make a neutral and precise description of behaviour)

I feel

(state your emotional response clearly and succinctly)

What I'd like is that you

(state what you would like to happen or how exactly you want the other person to behave)

For example

When you stand up and lean forward over the desk towards me I feel intimidated and I'd like you to be seated while you are speaking to me.

Or

When you interrupt what I am saying, I feel frustrated and I'd like you to listen without interruption until I have finished.

Or

When you listen carefully to what I'm saying without interrupting, I feel really pleased so I would like you to do the same thing next time we talk.

Saying 'no' when you mean 'no'

Sometimes we avoid saying no because we don't want to seem harsh, rude or uncooperative. Often this means we end up taking on more than we can manage or being exploited. There are ways to say 'no' respectfully and cooperatively.

Say no and explain clearly and unemotionally why you are refusing. Don't be overly apologetic.

Say no and offer the other person an alternative course of action.

Say yes, but explain this will mean something else will not get done.

Repeating

Repeating is simply that - repeating what you have said until you know you have been heard. Sometimes this is called the "broken record" technique.