
Information from your Patient Aligned Care Team

Assertive Communication

What is Assertiveness?

Assertiveness is communicating and expressing your thoughts, feelings, and opinions in a way that makes your views and needs clearly understood by others, without putting down their thoughts, feelings, or opinions. Assertiveness is the ability to express our thoughts and feelings openly in an **Honest, Appropriate, Respectful** and **Direct** way. It can be **HARD** to do, but it gets easier with practice. In assertive communication both individuals are considered to be equally important.

The Basic Assertive Rights of Every Human Being include:

- Having dignity and self-respect
- Saying NO when justified without feeling guilty
- Expressing your feelings
- Asking for what you want directly
- Feeling good about yourself
- Being able to change your mind
- Negotiating and reaching compromises when conflict exists
- Being able to make mistakes

Common Barriers to Assertiveness

Some people fear repercussions of acting assertively or may lack the skills to express themselves effectively. They may believe that they don't have the right to be assertive. Communicating assertively will not guarantee the other person will change his or her behavior and give you what you want, but it will help you establish limits and boundaries with others.

Passive Communication or Behavior

Passive communication and behavior involves allowing your own rights to be violated by failing to express honest feelings, thoughts, and beliefs, or by expressing your thoughts and

Assertive Communication (continued)

feelings in an apologetic manner that others can easily disregard. The messages you communicate might be:

“I don’t count; you can take advantage of me.”

“My thoughts and feelings don’t matter; only yours do.”

Aggressive Communication and Behavior

Aggressive communication and behavior involves communicating in a demanding, abrasive, or hostile way. It is insensitive to others’ rights, feelings and beliefs. The usual goals of aggression are domination and winning, forcing the other person to lose.

Some people mistakenly think they are being “assertive” when in fact they are being aggressive.

Passive – Aggressive

Passive-Aggressive communication involves expressing aggressive feelings in an indirect way through passive resistance, rather than by openly confronting an issue. Examples include: sulking; ignoring the other person; complaining behind the other person’s back; procrastinating; deliberately being late or slow; intentional poor performance; acting in a way that will frustrate others; and ‘acting innocent’ when you have done something to hurt someone.

Assertiveness Is Simple but Hard

NonAssertive (Passive)		Assertive (Tactful)		Aggressive (Rude)	
☹	H onest	✓	H onest	✓	H onest
✓	A ppropriate	✓	A ppropriate	☹	A ppropriate
✓	R espectful	✓	R espectful	☹	R espectful
☹	D irect	✓	D irect	✓	D irect

Assertiveness involves respecting your rights and the rights of others.

Important Facts About Assertiveness

- Use “I” or “me” statements such as “When you do _____, I feel _____.”
- Voice tone, eye contact, and body posture are important parts of assertive communication.
- Use a steady and calm voice, stand or sit up straight, look the other person in the eyes without glaring.
- Feelings are usually only one word (e.g. angry, anxious, happy, sad, hurt, frustrated, joyful)

Assertive Communication (continued)

- Remember, assertiveness doesn't guarantee that you will get what you want or that the other person will understand your concerns or be happy with what you said. It does improve the chances that the other person will understand what you want or how you feel and thus improve your chances of communicating effectively.

Four Essential Steps to Assertive Communication

1. Tell the person what you think about their behavior without accusing them.
2. Tell them how you feel when they behave a certain way.
3. Tell them how their behavior affects you and your relationship with them.
4. Tell them what you would prefer them to do instead.

XYZ* Formula for Effective Communication

The goal of the XYZ* formula is to express the way you feel (internal world) in response to other's behavior (external world) in specific situations. You are the only person who has access to your feelings. Others have no access to your internal world. The only way they will know what you are feeling is if you tell them. Similarly, you only have access to other people's external world. It is very easy to make a mistake when trying to guess what others are feeling or intending.

I feel X	when you do Y	in situation Z	and I would like *
I feel angry	when you leave your socks and underwear on the bedroom floor	after work	and I would like you to put them in the hamper.
I felt insignificant	when you left me with an empty gas tank	yesterday	and I would like you to leave the car with at least 1/4 tank of gas.
I feel angry	when you don't call me	if you are staying late at work	and I would like you to call as soon as you know you will be late.
I feel loved	when you kiss me	when you get home	and I would like you to do that everyday.

Reference

Hunter, C. L., Goodie, J. L., Oordt, M. S., & Dobmeyer, A. C. (2009). *Integrated Behavioral Health in Primary Care: Step-by-step Guidance for Assessment and Intervention*, American Psychological Association.