

D.E.S.C. Script for Assertiveness

Assertiveness is a manner of behaving that communicates respect for others as well as commands respect for yourself.

When you are assertive, you are able to:

- Express and communicate your feelings accurately.
- Ask for things you want.
- Say no to things you do not want.
- Have the opportunity to have your needs and wants met.
- Attain the respect of others.

People often fall into one of three primary modes of behavior: Passive, Assertive, and Aggressive.

Passive people:

- Tend to give in to other people's wishes while forgetting their own needs and wants.
- Have a difficult time saying no to people.
- Often have a hard time making decisions.
- Have a hard time maintaining eye contact.
- Avoid confrontation at all costs (e.g. not speaking up when the waiter brings you fish instead of chicken).

Aggressive people:

- Tend to be concerned only for their needs at the expense of others' needs.
- Have a tendency to lose their temper.
- May make decisions for other people.
- May shout or use bully techniques to get their way.
- May continue to argue long after someone has had enough.
- May call others names or even use obscenities when angry.
- May openly criticize or find fault with others ideas, opinions, or behaviors.
- Often use confrontation to get what they want.

Assertive people:

- Are concerned with both their needs as well as other people's needs.
- Are openly able to express themselves with other people.
- Are able to respond in a respectful manner when there is a disagreement.
- Are able to ask for help.
- Are confident and able to make decisions.
- Are able to say no to people/places/things they do not want.
- Are responsible for their own feelings/behaviors/thoughts.

Not everyone is assertive in all situations.

How can I develop more assertiveness?

In order to respond assertively try phrasing your request using what is called a DESC script. The DESC script was developed by Sharon and Gordon Bower and is discussed more fully in their book, *Asserting Yourself*. DESC stands for **Describe, Express, Specify, and Consequences**.

Try practicing the script for several situations that you just identified. You should try writing the script out and practicing it before you talk to the person.

- **Describe.** Describe the behavior/situation as completely and objectively as possible. Just the facts! "The last time, my brother George came to visit, I cleaned the entire house all by myself."
- **Express.** Express your feelings and thoughts about the situation/behavior. Try to phrase your statements using "I", and not "You". Beginning sentences with "You" often puts people on the defensive, which means they won't listen to you. "As a result, I felt exhausted and angry."
- **Specify.** Specify what behavior/outcome you would prefer to happen. "I would like the two of us to work on cleaning the house."
- **Consequences.** Specify the consequences (both positive and negative). "If we both work together, the house will be cleaned up faster and we can all enjoy his visit together." Or "If we work together, I will be less tired and irritable."

How to Say NO and mean it.

Saying no is an important component of learning to be assertive. It helps to develop boundaries, which can safeguard your time and energy. In some cases, saying no effectively may even help keep you safe from harm.

Edmund Bourne, PhD, in his book, *The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook*, has developed a way to effectively say no to both people who are close to you, and to those with whom you do not wish to have further contact.

Saying no, to a person that you do not want to be friends with, or who seems "unsafe"

- Simply saying "No" or "No thank you" is all that is needed. You may need to repeat "No" again. With these individuals you may not want to engage in any further conversation where you feel pressured to concede to their wishes.
- Pay attention to your nonverbal behavior. Use good eye contact, stand tall, shoulders back, etc. If you're slumped over you can't adequately assess the situation.

Remember: If you have been behaving passively for a long time, you might be tempted to move over into the aggressive mode of operating. This often happens after you've buried situations for so long that you turn into a powder keg. Just realize that learning to be assertive takes practice, and it's O.K. to make a few mistakes along the way. Despite what people tell you, you are human, so keep on trying these new skills.

Source: Adapted from Positive Coping Skills Toolbox
VA Mental Illness Research, Education, and Clinical Centers (MIRECC)

<http://www.athealth.com/Consumer/disorders/assertiveness.html>