

Assertiveness Tips & Strategies

- Make your own needs and feelings a priority, even with smaller or less important matters.
- Use your needs and feelings as a basis for making decisions for yourself and communicating these decisions to others.
- Just not wanting to do something is sufficient reason to say “no.”
- If you realize that you have failed to assert yourself in a situation, you can go back & let the other person know this – and then make the assertive response should have originally made.
- Do not feel compelled to explain or justify yourself, and do not apologize if you have done nothing wrong. You are not responsible for making another person understand why you are setting a limit or why you feel a certain way. If the other person is hurt, angry, or offended by your assertive response, you are also not responsible for these feelings.
- If you can anticipate a situation in which it will be difficult to assert yourself, plan ahead. Try getting one brief phrase or sentence in mind, and just repeating it until you are “heard.”

Example: *That really won't work for me.*

- Use escalating levels of assertiveness, starting with a more neutral response and becoming more direct or confrontational if the situation requires it.

Examples:

My schedule won't allow for that. (neutral)

I really need to say “no”. (more assertive)

I am feeling kind of pressured here.... (most assertive)

- Do not expect others to read your mind; most people will try to be considerate of your needs and feelings if you make them known.
- If you are dealing with someone who does not seem to respect your needs or feelings, use assertive responses that involve less emotional risk (e.g., limit-setting rather than sharing your feelings about how their behavior affects you).

Example: *I am not lending out any more books for the foreseeable future.*

- Do not pressure yourself to be directly assertive in every case. For example, if someone is deliberately mistreating you (*), open discussion will probably get you nowhere. These situations call for a more self-protective stance, for example, minimizing your contact and keeping things superficial & businesslike.

Remember: The main point of being assertive is to demonstrate respect for both yourself and others! Added benefits can include better relationships and communication, if the people you're dealing with are healthy enough to respond positively in everyone's best interest.

(*) If someone has been persistently disrespectful or abusive, you do not owe him/her the same courtesy and regard that you would usually show; do whatever you need to do to protect yourself. For example, you do not have to give two weeks' notice before quitting a job in which you are being sexually harassed. If you're having trouble leaving an abusive relationship, don't hesitate to seek help through a local abused persons program or a domestic violence hotline.