

Information Sheet

Assertive Communication

What is Assertive Communication?

Assertive communication involves clearly stating your thoughts, opinions, feelings and needs in a manner that is respectful to yourself and others. Assertiveness also involves being able to say 'No' to unreasonable requests or those you are not presently able to accommodate. Assertiveness is a skill that may be learnt and developed through practice.

Assertive communication comprises the speaking aspect of clear communication, with effective listening (please see *Approach Info* sheet on Effective Listening) forming the other and equally important element.

Benefits of Assertive Communication

Assertive communication has a number of benefits including: speaking up for your own interests while respecting the interests of others, requesting help when needed, effective conflict management, minimising misunderstandings and building stronger interpersonal relationships.

Assertive Communication: Communication consists of non-verbal (body-language) and verbal (content or words spoken) communication.

Assertive non-verbal communication includes facing the person you are speaking to with head held high and a relaxed, open posture (no crossed arms or fidgeting), leaning towards the other person slightly to demonstrate interest, maintaining eye contact without staring and speaking in a clear voice at a measured pace.

Assertive verbal communication involves speaking in a way that is respectful of the rights and needs of each party in the conversation.

Dealing with Conflict Assertively

1. Explain how you feel using an 'I' statement, e.g., 'I feel (annoyed, upset)...' - by taking responsibility for how you feel potential defensiveness of the listener will be minimised;

2. State what happened, e.g., '...when you arrived home an hour late without phoning..';
3. Then explain why you feel this way, e.g., '...because I was worried that something had happened to you...';
4. Indicate what you would prefer the other person to do, e.g., '...I would prefer you telephone me to let me know when you are going to be late and let me know when you anticipate getting home.'

Making a Request Assertively

The following steps improve the chances of your request being received favourable:

1. Acknowledge and express your appreciation for help received from the other person in the past;
2. Indicate clearly and respectfully the nature of your request using an assertive communication style;
3. Be prepared to negotiate or compromise about some aspects of your request and be willing to accept gracefully if the other person is unable or unwilling to comply with your wishes;
4. Thank the other person for their willingness to assist or for their time in discussing the issue.

Barriers to Assertive Communication

There are a variety of potential barriers to assertive communication, including:

- not having been taught how to communicate assertively, with a consequent overreliance on passive or aggressive communication styles (please see *Approach Info* sheet on Communication Styles);
- lack of clarity around the communication or the message you would like to convey
- the presence of strong emotions, which may make it difficult to think clearly and respond calmly.

Remember: Repeated practice of assertiveness skills will lead to improvement in delivery over time and foster the potential benefits previously mentioned.