

The Benefits of Being Assertive

Being assertive offers many powerful benefits. It helps you keep people from walking all over you, as the saying goes. On the flip side, it can also help you from steamrolling others.

Behaving assertively can help you:

- Gain self-confidence and self-esteem
- Understand and recognize your feelings
- Earn respect from others
- Improve communication
- Create win-win situations
- Improve your decision-making skills
- Create honest relationships
- Gain more job satisfaction

Some research suggests that being assertive also can help people cope better with many mental health problems, including depression, anorexia, bulimia, social anxiety disorder and schizophrenia.

Learning to be more assertive

People develop different styles of communication based on their life experiences. Your style has probably become so ingrained that you're not even aware of it. Although people tend to stick to the same communication style over time, you can learn to be more flexible in how you communicate.

Here are some tips to help you become more assertive:

- **Assess your style.** Do you voice your opinions or remain silent? Do you say yes to additional work even when your plate is full? Are you quick to judge or blame? Do people seem to dread or fear talking to you?
- **Use "I" statements.** Using "I" statements lets others know what you're thinking without sounding accusatory. For instance, say, "I disagree," rather than, "You're wrong."
- **Practice saying no.** If you have a hard time turning down requests, try saying, "No, I can't do that now." Don't beat around the bush — be direct. If an explanation is appropriate, keep it brief.
- **Rehearse what you want to say.** If it's challenging to say what you want or think, practice typical scenarios you encounter. For instance, if you want to ask for a raise, practice what you want to say. Say it out loud. It may help to write it out first. Consider role playing with a friend or colleague and ask for blunt feedback.
- **Use body language.** Communication isn't just verbal. Act confident even if you aren't feeling it. You may find that your body convinces your brain! Keep an upright posture but lean forward a bit. Make regular eye contact. Maintain a neutral or positive facial expression. Don't wring your hands or use dramatic gestures. It can help to practice in front of a mirror.
- **Keep emotions in check.** Conflict is hard for most people. Maybe you get angry or frustrated, or maybe you feel like crying. Although these feelings are normal, they can get in the way of resolving conflict. If you feel too emotional going into a situation, wait a bit if possible. Then, work on remaining calm. Breathe slowly. Keep your voice even and firm.
- **Start small.** At first, practice your new skills in situations that are low risk. For instance, try out your assertiveness on a partner or friend before tackling a difficult situation at work. Evaluate yourself afterward and tweak your approach as necessary.