

## 10 Top Tips for Assertiveness

Ulla Cameron (Counselling & Wellbeing Service; 2010)

You may want to read these tips in conjunction with the 'Ten Tips For Group Work', which is also available on the Self Help pages. If you wish, you can then practise your assertiveness skills in a group context!

### 1. Listen To Yourself And Others – Respect

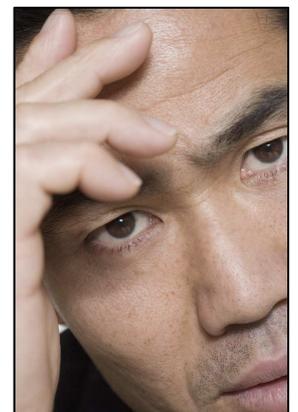
Listen to yourself and consider what you need from either the environment or the other person, and what you can do yourself. Remember to respect yourself as you are entitled to have your own thoughts, needs, and wishes, but remember to respect others too, as they are also entitled to their own needs and thoughts, which may be very different from yours.



### 2. Open Minded – Your Rights, Their Rights

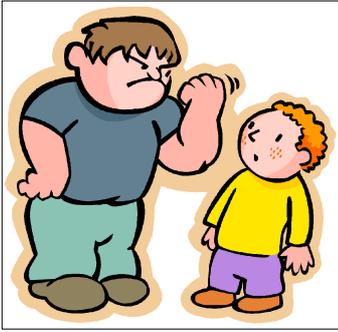
Open your mind to the possibility that you have rights. You have the right to be happy and to say what you feel or think. Others also have the same rights. It's not about being right or wrong, clever or stupid (and, yes, you have the right to be any of these) or good or bad. You have the right to change your mind, know or not know something, feel as you do and think as you see fit. So does the other. So

assertiveness is not about manipulating or controlling the other person's behaviour, but putting your thoughts out for the other to hear.



### 3. How Do I Feel?

Pay attention to how you feel about the situation, the circumstances or the behaviour of others. Assertiveness is not about trying to change the other person's behaviour to suit your liking, but about leaving the decision with the other person once they know how you feel about what they do or what your thoughts are about their behaviour.



#### **4. Plan – Assertive, Not a Bully - Victim - Rescuer**

Plan what you want to say. It's usually better to first plan and then speak out, rather than speak and then regret it. Saying something assertively is different to saying it aggressively. Assertive sentences often begin with 'I' and aggressive ones with 'you'. For example, it is assertive to say: "I feel upset when you spit at me." It is aggressive or bullying to say: "You f\*\*\*\*\* moron, do it again and I'll f\*\*\*\*\* throttle you!" It is not assertive to say nothing to the person spitting at you, if it bothers you. You might feel like a victim. If you say nothing but moan about it to everyone else who cares to listen, you may hope that they do something about it by becoming your rescuer. This can be considered 'passive aggressive' behaviour, as your friend might get sick of listening to your moans and, if he or she is not assertive enough to tell you this, she/he might do something to stop the spitting. The problem with bully - victim- rescuer is that they can, and often do, exchange places frequently. Assertiveness does not play this game.



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#### **5. The Body Talks Too**

Your posture tells something about you. If you tower over someone, high above their face, it may be experienced as aggressive. Yet if you sit slumped in a corner, looking away, quietly whispering: "Would you mind, sorry but I feel upset when you spit at me," you can imagine that although you've said what you feel, the response may not be long lasting, as your posture says that you are rather feeble and inclined to accept the role of a victim.



#### **6. Say What You Mean**

Say what you mean. Not what you think the others want to hear from you, or what your mum would like you to say, or talk about the weather or just smile quietly. If you have some thoughts of your own, share them. Note that being shy is being stingy!

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#### **7. Mean What You Say**

Mean what you say, otherwise it's confusing. If you buy a hot meal in a restaurant and it's delivered to your table stone cold, it's in your interest to say to the waiter that the meal is cold. Don't say "It's lovely thank you," unless you like cold gravy or "Sorry, it's really nice, but could be a teeny bit hotter, though." Mean what you say and you are clear.



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#### **8. A Mature Manner**

A mature manner is required for assertiveness. This is because you need to understand that the whole world does not revolve around you. Life is not all about "I scream and I get what I want, and I get it right now". It is about trusting that you can tolerate frustration, despite



feeling frustrated. The other person has wishes, needs and wants that are wholly his or hers. You have no responsibility for them. Therefore it's his or her right not to approve of everything you do, not to agree with you, not to think like you, not to like your favourite colour, soup, film etc. The other person's thoughts, likes or dislikes do not make you any less of a person. A mature attitude means an ability to accept that you two are separate people, with two different minds. Not better or worse.

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### **9. Anxiety is Good For You**

Often people think that they must not show any weakness, such as anxiety, or others will use it against them. That's already a war-like situation, as you are wasting your energy in second guessing negative attributes in others and finding cover for what you imagine the other is looking for in you! Hiding your anxiety often makes you more anxious because you then have a secret that you must protect. In any case, why are you assuming that others are out to get you? Is that because you are out to get them too? What about acknowledging your weaknesses and then moving on? Anxiety might be thought of as a weakness, but in fact it's essential. Without anxiety you would not get out of bed in the morning (or evening, depending on your preference), so saying out aloud: "This makes me feel anxious, but I'll get on with it," often helps.



### **10. You Win - I Win**

Maybe this tip needs not be about winning and losing, but about accepting difference? There is no need for winning or losing, nor conflict, but accepting that sometimes we have different needs and wants and we are entitled to express them. It's then the other person's prerogative what they make of the information that you've given them and how they respond. It's also about not being a 'victim' or a 'bully' or a 'rescuer', but just assertive.

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### **References**

<http://www.livestrong.com/article/14699-improving-assertive-behavior/>