



The University of New Mexico STUDENT HEALTH CENTER

Assertiveness

Assertiveness is defined as behavior which enables people to act in their own best interest by expressing their thoughts and feelings directly and honestly.

Assertiveness allows you to stand up for your rights when someone else is trying to infringe on them, and it allows you to do this while expressing a full range of emotions.

How can you tell if your behavior is assertive? Will a person observing conclude that your behavior was not intended to be hurtful? It might be described as being honest, direct, expressive and non-destructive, and a 'reasonable' person would not be hurt by it. Sometimes, however, your behavior, even assertive behavior, does have the effect of hurting another. Many times, this prevents you from behaving assertively again. You become afraid that if you continue to stand up for yourself, others will get angry with you, that it will be awful, and that you are somehow responsible for his/her feelings. This is NOT accurate. The person you are interacting with is as responsible for their feelings as you are for yours.

Let's compare your choice of behavioral responses. Assertiveness is standing up for your rights while respecting the rights of others. Aggressive behavior is getting what you want with no regard to the rights of others. Passiveness is having respect for other's rights while having no respect for your own. One last category, passive-aggressiveness, is having no respect for anyone's rights. This might look like a refusal to communicate, being non-specific during interactions, and expressing double messages. As you can probably tell, assertiveness seems to be the best response in most situations.

What does assertive behavior look and sound like? Your body and voice should match the message being given. Look a person directly in the eye, face the person squarely, and use appropriate gestures and facial expressions. Your voice will be level and in control, and your communication will be spontaneous, getting across feelings and accepting responsibility without judgment.

Remember the five Cs of assertiveness: COOLNESS -keep it, don't lose self-control. CONSIDER the other person's point of view. COMMUNICATE feelings and flexibility. CLARIFY how you would like others to behave toward you. CONSEQUENCES: state them as you see them.

Why should you adopt assertive behaviors? Because you will experience a significant increase in self-esteem. You will stop feeling like a doormat. You will increase your ability to get things done. You will be able to express your full range of emotions effectively. You will be able to handle conflict more confidently. You will be able to handle criticism more openly and honestly. You will be able to say no without feeling guilty, and you will reduce your fears and anxieties when interacting with others.

