

## Assertiveness: A Learned Skill

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*Your Health Magazine*, Arlington-Fairfax Ed., July 2012, Page 25

One of the ways we can increase our self-esteem and decrease feelings of anxiety, stress, and being overwhelmed is by learning to be more assertive. Assertiveness includes expressing your feelings, standing up for yourself, asking for what you want, and saying no to something you don't want. Assertive messages set limits and convey our feelings to others.

What many people don't realize is that assertiveness is a skill and not an inborn trait. It is something that can be learned and improved with practice.

The inability to be assertive may stem from being unaware of your personal needs, from the belief that others' needs are more important and legitimate than your own, from feelings of unworthiness and low-self-esteem, or from fear of creating conflict.

When we are not assertive, we reinforce low self-esteem, allow others to decide for us, fail to achieve goals, and risk sacrificing ourselves to feelings of exhaustion and frustration.

Assertiveness involves the direct, honest, and firm expression of one's feelings, preferences, needs, or opinions in a manner that is neither threatening nor punishing toward another person.

Assertiveness is often confused with aggressive behavior; however, they are not the same. While aggression involves enhancing yourself at the expense of others, assertion maintains the self-respect of both parties. Assertion does not involve hurting, manipulating, or violating the rights of another person. It involves standing up for and protecting yourself in a manner that is also respectful of others.

When delivering an assertive message, it is important to consider both the verbal content of the message as well as the non-verbal parts of the message, including tone of voice, demeanor, and what your body language and facial expressions say.

To begin increasing your assertiveness, think of situations where you wish you would have been more assertive but found it difficult to be. Consider why you stopped yourself from acting assertively. Are there any irrational beliefs that exist, such as, "If I'm assertive, others will be mad or think I'm a controlling person" or "It is wrong and selfish to say no to others' requests"?

Consider your beliefs about yourself and what you deserve. Become more in tune with your own unique feelings, needs, and wants and recognize that respect for

yourself and others includes honestly expressing these things. Remember that assertive responses don't attack, surrender to, or sabotage another person. They simply state your wants, needs, or opinions.

As you become more assertive, you'll find that you like yourself better and that others will respond to you in new, different, and more satisfying ways.