

## Assertiveness Skills

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### Communication

Communication between people takes many forms and comes under many descriptions. Some of the communication styles people use to 'solve' conflicts include being *passive* ('that's okay with me' when it's not okay), *aggressive* ('Don't dare argue with me and do this whether you like it or not ...or else ...') or *passive-aggressive*, (I don't want to say anything now, but I won't comply ...). None of these methods really deal with the conflict effectively.

Being *assertive* is a more direct way of getting your point across in an open, honest way. When we are distressed, anxious or not coping well, however, we find it hard to be assertive. We are then more vulnerable to being passive, aggressive, or passive aggressive. And so the conflict lingers on.

Learning how to be properly assertive is a valuable skill. Assertiveness does not mean speaking or acting aggressively. It means stating your case in a clear, positive way, as if you are an equal part of the conversation and deserve to be heard. You are neither lording it over the other person, nor speaking from a frightened, submissive perspective.

In the following imaginary scenario, two people share a flat. One of them has not been doing his share of the housework. The other person is very annoyed, and wants to find out what is going on. She doesn't want to get angry and lose her flat-mate, but she wants him to know she is not happy that he has not kept his word.

The following 7 assertiveness statements are examples of how this situation could be tackled. When we are assertive, we show that we 'own' the statements we make. First, make sure you have the person's attention so that what you say is really heard, and ensure that you stay calm.

### Assertiveness Statements

1. State clearly what is bothering you: *'We agreed when you came that we would share the housework. For the last month, you have not kept to your agreement to clean the bathroom. It is now dirty.'*
2. How you feel about it: *'I feel let down and disappointed.'*
3. What you think about it: *'I am wondering if you have forgotten about our agreement.'*
4. Give them an opening to reply or state their case: *'Was your understanding different from mine?'*
5. State what you want from them: *'Are you going to clean the bathroom, and if so, when can you do it?'*
6. Acknowledge them listening: *'I appreciate you listening to me and giving this some thought.'*
7. Try to end on a 'win-win' note, where both of you come out feeling you have gained something: *'Thank you for agreeing to clean the bathroom. Next time you can't do it, let me know and we can work something out. If we keep communication open, it will save us both distress in the future.'*

Try being assertive when faced with a conflict or difficult situation. Explain what you feel and think, without withdrawing or becoming aggressive. Respectfully listen to and reply to the other person.