

Assertive Communication

YOU WERE BORN ASSERTIVE!

Infants and young children have direct ways of making their needs and desires known! Without being conditioned or taught what is "polite," they naturally, constantly ask for what they want - even though they aren't sure they will get it. However, as we grow older, we tend to adopt less direct styles of communicating. Messages we receive from society and significant others seem to discourage what is perceived as "making waves," which is generally nothing more than making our needs and feelings known - directly and respectfully.

POWER TO THE PEOPLE

Another word for assertiveness is "personal power" or "empowerment." Assertive behavior and communication demonstrates self-respect and self-confidence, an awareness of and respect for others. It begins when you look at the world from the position that you are worthwhile and have rights AND you acknowledge that others are worthwhile and have rights, also.

When you communicate assertively, you are expressing positive and negative feelings - honestly and directly. You acknowledge that you have the right to be listened to and taken seriously, to say no without feeling guilty, to ask for what you want, to make mistakes. At the same time, you acknowledge that the other person has identical rights. The result is that your relationships become much more genuine, because you are communicating honestly and openly.

Sometimes it is difficult to learn to communicate assertively. You may go to the opposite extreme and express yourself in an accusing or angry manner. Becoming assertive takes time and practice. What is important to understand about assertive communication is that it does not guarantee that people will agree with you or that you will always get what you want. It does, however, significantly enhance your self-respect and improves your chances for enjoyable relationships.

"I" MESSAGES: FORMULA FOR SUCCESS

The key to communicating assertively is to express yourself clearly, without blaming or judging the other person. An accepted and proven method for accomplishing this is using the "I" message format.



"I" MESSAGE FORMAT: "WHEN...THEN...I FEEL..."

WHEN	Describe (objectively) other person's behavior
THEN (the effect is)	Effect of the behavior on you
I FEEL	Your feelings; do not accuse or blame
I'D PREFER	Describe the behavior you want/prefer

"I" MESSAGES VERSES BLAMING/JUDGING LANGUAGE (conflict escalators)

- "WHEN you do not call me when you say you will, (THEN) I imagine that something bad has happened to prevent you from calling. I FEEL scared and anxious. I WANT/I WOULD PREFER that you call, even collect, when you say you will." (Assertive)

Rather than...

"You're so inconsiderate!" (Conflict Escalator)



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- "WHEN you don't put things away after using them, (THEN) I end up doing it and I FEEL really resentful. I WOULD PREFER your cooperation in keeping things in their proper storage places." (Assertive)

Rather than...

"You're such a slob!" (Conflict Escalator)

- "WHEN you get up and walk away while I'm talking to you, (THEN) I assume that you aren't interested in what's important to me. I FEEL hurt and ignored. I WOULD PREFER that you give me and our conversation your full attention." (Assertive)

Rather than...

"Don't walk away from me!" (Conflict Escalator)

PRACTICING ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION



Instructions:

Express the following messages using the "I" message format (WHEN...THEN... I FEEL... I WANT/WOULD PREFER)

Message:

"I can never count on you to do what you tell me you will do." Rewrite in "I" message format:

Message:

"Come on and go with us. You can do your homework later." (You are facing a deadline and really need to work on your project.) Rewrite in "I" message format:

Message:

"You're a slob. I'm sick and tired of you trashing this place after I clean up." Rewrite in "I" message format:

Message:

"You *promised* me that you would mow the lawn. You're completely irresponsible." Rewrite in "I" message format:

Message:

"I already told you I couldn't help you out tonight. Leave me alone!" Rewrite in "I" message format:

Message:

"Get off my back!" Rewrite in "I" message format:

Message:

"You never listen to me when I'm talking to you." Rewrite in "I" message format:

Message:

"Stop interrupting me." Rewrite in "I" message format:

Message:

"You never appreciate all I do for you." Rewrite in "I" message format:

Message:

"Gee, what a surprise. You're only an hour late this time." Rewrite in "I" message format: