

# Assertiveness

## What is Assertiveness?

To be assertive is to communicate your needs, wants, feelings, beliefs and opinions in a direct and honest way, without intentionally hurting anyone's feelings. It is the middle ground between acting in a way that is aggressive and passive. Communicating with others in an assertive way can lead to a "win/win" situation where everyone involved gets what they want or need.

Being assertive may include standing up for yourself or what you believe in, valuing yourself and not always putting others before yourself.



Being assertive and communicating your needs can sometimes be labelled 'selfish'. As women, we are often discouraged to be assertive; we are taught to be quiet, to put others first, not to make a fuss or that our needs are not as important as the needs of others.

## Learning to be Assertive

Becoming assertive often means changing the way you have been communicating for a long time. This can take time and practice.

Some ways you can work on becoming assertive are:

- Decide that you want to be assertive rather than aggressive or passive
- Be aware of your own worth, strengths and weaknesses
- Think about a recent conflict and imagine how you could have handled it in a more assertive way
- Practise talking and acting in an assertive way alone or with a friend
- Respect the wants, needs and feelings of others and accept that their viewpoints may be different to yours
- When in conflict try to take a problem solving approach and try to work with the other person, not against them
- Be honest about how you feel, without making accusations or trying to 'guilt-trip' the other person
- Try to use words like 'I feel' and 'I think', rather than blaming words like 'You always' and 'You never'
- Try hard to listen to and respect other people's points of view
- Suggest to the other person that you both brainstorm ways of solving problems
- If something doesn't go well, learn from it and plan what you might change about how you respond next time



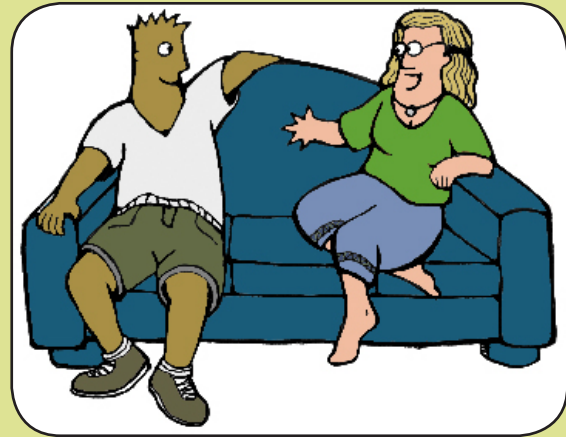
## Basic rights when being assertive

Here is a list of things that you have a right to expect when you are communicating with other people.

You can avoid being passive by being clear that you want these rights to be respected.

Similarly you can avoid being aggressive by making sure that you respect these rights with those you are communicating with.

1. I have the right to be treated with respect, recognising that we are all 100% worthwhile.
2. I have the right to take the necessary time to calm down and think.
3. I have the right to change my mind or to say no.
4. I have the right to ask for information.
5. I have the right to make mistakes, recognise my limits and take responsibility for them.
6. I have the right to feel good about myself.



## For more information

Ring the Power On Team at Women's Health West on 9689 9588 or look us up online at [www.whwest.org.au](http://www.whwest.org.au)



Source: "Assertiveness", Better Health Channel  
<http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Assertiveness?open>, 2006.