

How to be assertive

1. Guess if the people described are assertive or not. Put a tick or a cross.

They communicate in a way that is too passive: they feel that they should serve everyone else as they feel inferior.	
Their style is too aggressive: they feel superior and want everyone to serve them.	
They show they respect themselves and other people.	
They are not too shy and not too pushy.	

2. Read this short text on assertiveness and check your guesses:

Assertiveness is a healthy way of communicating, stating your opinion or decision in an honest and respectful way. You need to be assertive every day: while making an appointment with friends or a teacher, asking someone on a date, having a job interview. Some people who can't be assertive often sound too aggressive because they feel that everyone should serve them. Other unassertive people may seem too passive because they feel that they should serve everyone else. They are convinced that their own feelings and needs are less important. An assertive person is in between. He respects both himself and other people in order to cooperate for the mutual benefit.

3. Look at the table below and read the descriptions of different types of behaviour. Which of the following people are assertive? Put a tick next to that person.

If you ask Mike where he would like to go for lunch, he'll say 'I don't know — what do you suggest?' Most often he lets others decide, but then he says to himself: 'It's a shame I didn't say what I really wanted'.	
John is usually upset when his classmates do most of the talking. But in fact, they don't even realise that he tries to say something because he speaks so quietly.	
When you talk to Jake, he usually interrupts you. You have a feeling that he's not listening to you.	
Nelly seems bossy and hostile. If she disagrees with your opinion, she often rolls her eyes and uses words like 'ridiculous', 'stupid', 'nonsense'.	
Mark knows how to make others listen to him. He says what he wants confidently and very loudly.	
Chris listens to what you say. If he disagrees with you, he says so in a way that doesn't make you feel wrong or silly.	

4. Complete the definition of assertiveness:

Assertiveness is _____ in which you _____ while still _____ . When you are assertive, _____.

you are neither passive nor aggressive
respecting the rights of others
demonstrate the healthy confidence to stand up for yourself
an interpersonal skill
but direct and honest



5. You can learn to be assertive but it takes time and practice. Read about the habits that make you more assertive. Are the sentences in the box TRUE or FALSE?

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Assertiveness is a great skill for managing positive relationships with others and being true to your own feelings and wants. An assertive person operates from a position of equality and respect. That means that you should treat other people and yourself as equal. No one is better, no one is worse, so 'respect your own rights, values and beliefs while respecting the rights, values and beliefs of others.'¹

Being assertive is a skill that needs practice. You will have better times and worse times. Don't get discouraged but try to learn from your mistakes. Experts² suggest some simple ways to help you develop the skill of being assertive:

1. If you want something or there is something annoying you, just say it. Look confident when you speak. Stand up straight. You can smile or keep a neutral face (it helps you keep your cool and hide any strong emotions). Make good eye contact with the person you are talking to.
2. After you state your opinion, try to understand other points of view. Don't get angry because of the differences; it doesn't necessarily mean that you are right and the other person is wrong. Listen respectfully and don't interrupt when he/she is speaking. Remember: People who give respect get respect in return.³
3. Be simple and direct. Don't use long explanations.
4. While saying what you think, speak in a way that doesn't suggest accusations or make the other person feel guilty.
5. In order to avoid accusations, use 'I' statements. Say things like 'I think ... ' or 'I feel '. Don't use aggressive language such as 'You never...' or 'You always.... ' because the person you are talking to may feel frustrated and quit the conversation.
6. Even if you feel excited when expressing your opinion, try to stay calm. You will sound more confident.
7. Practise in front of a mirror or with a friend. Pay attention to your body language as well as to the words you choose.

To sum it up, remember the saying: 'There is nobody better than you, but you are no better than anyone else'⁴. If you realise that you are of equal value to others, you will sooner or later accept the fact that sometimes your own preferences will be met while at other times somebody else's preferences will win. You shouldn't feel guilty when you don't agree to somebody's wishes or desires. But remember not to get upset with others if they don't always do what you like. It's okay to have different opinions and needs, but you should communicate them with respect to others and to yourself.

Assertiveness relates to mutual respect – respect for ourselves and respect for others.	True/False
Try to understand the other person's point of view. Don't interrupt when they are explaining it to you.	True/False
Having a different point of view means that one side is right and the other side is wrong.	True/False
Be honest – say how you feel or what you want so that the other person feels a bit guilty.	True/False
Look the person in the eye, keep your face relaxed and speak in a normal voice.	True/False
Be patient when you practice being assertive. You will sometimes do better than at other times.	True/False

6. In groups, make a poster promoting the saying:

‘There is nobody better than you, but you are no better than anyone else’

Answer key:

1. Guess if the people described are assertive or not. ⁵

Table 1: Put a tick if you think that such people are assertive. Make a guess.	
They communicate in a way that is too passive: they feel that they should serve everyone else as they feel inferior.	X
Their style is too aggressive: they feel superior and want everyone to serve them.	X
They show they respect themselves and other people.	✓
They are not too shy and not too pushy.	✓

3. Look at the table below and read the descriptions of different types of behaviour.

Table 2: Which of the following people are assertive? Put a tick or a cross next to that person.	
If you ask Mike where he would like to go for lunch, he'll say 'I don't know — what do you suggest?' Most often he lets others decide, but then he says to himself: 'It's a shame I didn't say what I really wanted'.	X
John is usually upset when his classmates do most of the talking. But in fact, they don't even realise he tries to say something because he speaks so quietly.	X
When you talk to Jake, he usually interrupts you. You have a feeling that he's not listening to you.	X
Nelly seems bossy and hostile. If she disagrees with your opinion, she often rolls her eyes and uses words like 'ridiculous', 'stupid', 'nonsense'.	X
Mark knows how to make others listen to him. He says what he wants confidently and very loudly .	X (Very loudly is rather aggressive)
Chris listens to what you say. If he disagrees with you, he says so in a way that doesn't make you feel wrong or silly.	✓

4. Complete the definition of assertiveness:

“Assertiveness is an interpersonal skill in which you demonstrate the healthy confidence to stand up for yourself while still respecting the rights of others. When you are assertive, you are neither passive nor aggressive, but direct and honest.”¹



5. You can learn to be assertive but it takes time and practice. Read about the habits that make you more assertive. Are the sentences in the box TRUE or FALSE?

Assertiveness relates to mutual respect – respect for ourselves and respect for others.	True
Try to understand the other person’s point of view. Don’t interrupt when they are explaining it to you.	True
Having a different point of view means that one side is right and the other side is wrong.	False
Be honest – say how you feel or what you want so that the other person feels a bit guilty.	False (Be honest – say how you feel or what you want but don’t make anyone feel guilty.)
Look the person in the eye, keep your face relaxed and speak in a normal voice.	True
Be patient when you practice being assertive. You will sometimes do better than at other times.	True

¹ Buckley Carthage, ‘Why be assertive? 4 major benefits of assertive behaviour’, <https://www.liveyourtruestory.com/why-be-assertive-4-major-benefits-of-assertive-behaviour-communication/> (access date: 26.06.2019)

² Daskal Lolly I, ‘7 Powerful Habits That Make You More Assertive’, <https://www.inc.com/lolly-daskal/7-powerful-habits-that-make-you-more-assertive.html> (access date: 28.02.2019) and ‘10 tips for being assertive’, <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/ten-tips/10-tips-for-being-assertive> (access date: 28.02.2019)

³ D’Arcy Lyness, PhD (reviewer), ‘Assertiveness’, <https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/assertive.html> (access date: 27.06.2019)

⁴ Buckley Carthage, ‘Why be assertive? 4 major benefits of assertive behaviour’, <https://www.liveyourtruestory.com/why-be-assertive-4-major-benefits-of-assertive-behaviour-communication/> (access date: 26.06.2019)

⁵ Based on D’Arcy Lyness, PhD (reviewer), ‘Assertiveness’, <https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/assertive.html> (access date: 27.06.2019)

