



Assertiveness

The term “assertive” has received somewhat of a bad rap recently as it’s commonly misused to describe someone mean, disrespectful and inconsiderate in how they communicate. However, being assertive is an essential life skill and is proven to help reduce symptoms consistent with anxiety and depression. Furthermore, it can boost confidence and overall self-esteem when addressing potential conflicts in the future.

What is Assertiveness

Assertiveness is a way of communicating our thoughts, feelings, and needs in a way that doesn’t override others’ needs and rights when discussing the same issue. Assertiveness essentially sits on “spectrum”, with passive communication being placed on one side, aggressive communication on the opposite side, and assertive communication being in the middle. These communication styles all have distinct characteristics which influence desirable outcomes.

Passive

Prioritises others’ needs and rights over their own.

Assertive

Acknowledges the needs and rights of others, whilst respecting their own.

Aggressive

Prioritises their own needs and rights over others.

You may have also heard the term “passive-aggressive.” This is when someone has difficulties expressing themselves appropriately, causing them to feel angry. They cope by communicating their dissatisfaction indirectly. Common examples include gossiping, removing others’ belongings without asking, not returning phone calls/emails, or consistently arriving late to work.

How assertive we are depends on a number of factors:

- ▷ Perceptions - Our opinions, views and interpretation on life.
- ▷ Emotions - Our feelings, fears, values and desires.
- ▷ Self-image - Our confidence, our self-esteem, level of competence, and how we feel we ‘fit in’.
- ▷ Interpersonal skills - Our ability to recognise boundaries, notice body language, handle different situations, and approach and relate to people.

These factors are different for everybody, but they can also be different for each of us at different times in our lives or across situations. Being assertive is not something we are born with – it is dependent on our upbringing, our culture, even our gender. Men have historically been conditioned to be ‘strong’ communicators and women to be soft and passive. When we cannot communicate our needs assertively or can’t express what we want, even to ourselves, we feel vulnerable and insecure. Perhaps you have grown up with many “put-downs” and received frequent negative messages about yourself. You can carry these messages for many years without knowing it.

BSS can help by:

- ▷ Identifying your communication style.
- ▷ Assessing the impact your communication style has on you and others.
- ▷ Identifying how your communication style was developed.
- ▷ Helping reframe your thoughts, better manage your emotions, and change your behaviour so you’re more assertive and influence a better outcome for you.
- ▷ Improve your confidence when interacting with others.



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