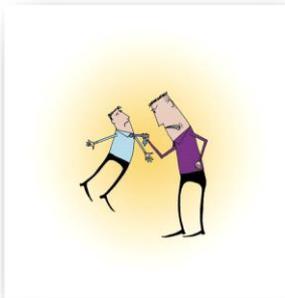


Assertiveness

What is assertiveness?

Assertiveness is an important interpersonal skill used when communicating with others. It involves expressing your thoughts, feelings and needs in a calm, positive and confident manner, whilst also listening to and respecting the needs and wants of others. To understand what assertiveness is, it can be helpful to explain what it is not. Assertiveness is NOT communicating in an aggressive or passive manner.



Aggressive communication – Often those who use aggressive communication styles believe they are being assertive as it does involve sticking up for yourself and getting your needs met. However, it differs significantly from assertiveness as it involves the individual believing that only their needs and wants are important, therefore ignoring the needs of others.

Traits of aggressive communication may involve:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Believing that only your needs matter • Looking out for yourself • Often involves bullying or pushing others around • May lead to shouting or physical aggression | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talking over people, interrupting or not listening • forcing your opinion and needs onto them • taking rather than compromising • may become easily frustrated |
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Examples of Aggressive Verbal and Nonverbal behaviours:

Verbal	Non- Verbal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • emphasis on “I” • loud and overbearing tone • may use criticism and humiliation to get needs met • hard and sharp tone • blaming • threatening (questions and response) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finger pointing • Fist clenching • Pacing around • Crossing arms • Staring down in an attempt to intimidate • Scowling • Firm set jaw

Impact of Aggressive communication

Using aggressive communication may certainly get your needs met, however this is often at the expense of others. Recipients of aggressive communication often feel devastated and put down, which in turn may lower their self-esteem. As a result, aggressive communication often damages relationships as it induces fear and hostility.

Passive communication – Involves ignoring or not expressing you own needs and wants, or if you do express them, doing so in an apologetic manner which makes it easy for others to disregard them. A passive communicator may allow others to make decisions for them and often prioritises the needs of others before their own. Individuals who are more passive in their communication style may undermine their own thoughts, feelings and opinions by using passive phrases such as “oh, I really don’t mind”

Traits of passive communication may involve:

- Believing that your needs do not matter at all
- Trying to keep the peace
- not expressing your thoughts, feelings, needs and wants
- prioritising needs of others
- Not talking or being heard
- Allowing yourself to be bullied
- Lack of confidence
- Allowing others to take advantage
- Difficulty saying no

Examples of passive Verbal and Nonverbal behaviours:

Verbal	Non- Verbal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long rambling sentences • Justifying • Apologising • Self-put downs • Self- dismissal • Soft/quiet tone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor eye contact • Hunched shoulders • Hand wringing • Lip biting • Frequent throat clearing • Covering mouth with hands

Impact of passive communication

Passive communication often involves pleasing others, therefore it is an effective way to avoid conflict. However, this type of communication may result (whether intentionally or not) in others taking advantage of your “good nature” by making unreasonable requests which you feel unable to say no to. Passive communication can damage relationships as you may feel that other people are ignoring or simply not caring about your needs, this can lead to feelings of inferiority, resentment, anger, anxiety, hurt and disappointment, all of which will impact negatively on your self-worth.



Assertive communication – Think of assertiveness as being the perfect balance between aggressive and passive communication. It allows you to stand up for your own rights, and the rights of others in a way that is open, honest and respectful and recognises the importance of both people’s needs. Assertive communication enables us to be able to ask for what we want from others, as well as providing us with the ability to say no.



Traits of Assertive communication may involve:

- Recognising that your needs matter as much as anyone else's
- Making sure that things are fair for everybody involved
- Ability to say no
- Talking and listening
- Compromising
- Standing up for yourself
- Expressing your points clearly and confidently
- Respectful

Examples of passive Verbal and Nonverbal behaviours:

Verbal	Non- Verbal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tone is not over loud or quiet • Few hesitations • Brief "I" statements • Seeking others opinion • Non blaming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open hand movements • Relaxed body posture • Direct eye contact (without staring) • Appropriate facial expressions • Relaxed jaw

Impact of assertive communication

Using assertive communication has a positive impact on our relationships as we are communicating in a way which allows all parties to feel that they are being listened to and that all needs are equally important, which in turn increases self-worth in both parties. It allows for clear open communication about our needs; therefore, it is less likely that confusion or conflict will arise. Whilst Assertive communication does not guarantee that we will get what we want, it certainly increases the likelihood of getting our needs met.

We at Wellbeing understand that whilst this is the most effective form of communication, it is not always easy to act in an assertive manner.

So what stops us from acting assertively?

Interpersonal reasons – human beings are social creatures and we like to be around others. Quite often people fear that by expressing their needs or saying no may upset the other individual, cause conflict or lead to rejection by the other person. People may hold certain beliefs that by not acting assertively, you are more likely to be accepted and loved. Fear of creating distance from others is understandable, however remember that being assertive is more likely to improve relationships as it allows you to be more open and honest about what is going on for you and is therefore less likely to lead to frustration and conflict.

Low self-esteem - people with low self-esteem find it difficult to be assertive, as they may believe that their opinions do not matter or that nobody would be interested in what you have to say. When we hold these beliefs, we are viewing ourselves as unworthy or not good enough. Lack of self-

esteem may result in others taking advantage of you which in turn can lead you to entering a vicious cycle of increasing low self-esteem. Acting more assertively allows your voice to be heard, resulting in increased confidence and self-esteem.

You do not know how - articulating our needs and wants can be difficult and we may not have had the opportunity to learn the necessary skills to become assertive. The good news is that assertiveness is a skill that can be learned and developed.

Tips on how to become assertive:

1. **Be specific** – first work out for yourself what it is exactly what you want to say. This will enable you to express what you want to say in a clear and direct manner. Keep your statement brief and do not over complicate them.
2. **Use “I” statements** – When we use the term “you” in communication, e.g. “you make me feel, why have you not done x, y and Z” it is implying that the other person is at blame. This can result in the person at the receiving end of this message to becoming defensive and conflict is more likely to arise. Using “I” statements, keeps the onus of responsibility on the speaker, whilst at the same time effectively defining what is needed.
3. **Compromise** – remember assertiveness is not about winning. In assertive communication, all parties are equal; therefore it is about finding a compromise where both individual’s needs are taken into consideration. This will involve actively listening to the other person’s point of view and working together to create a solution to the problem. Remember it is also okay to “agree” to “disagree”, having a different point of view does not mean that either party is wrong in what they say.
4. **Say no** – everybody has the right to say no. If you would like to say no, acknowledge the person’s request, and without apologising, state why you are declining their request. If possible, suggest an alternative course of action where both parties needs will be met (compromise). If saying no feels difficult or you are unsure as to what you would like to do, it is perfectly reasonable to state that you would like some time to think about it. If the other person persist with their request use the “broken record” technique – this involves repeating the word “no” or a concise statement of refusal over and over again.
5. **Don’t make excuses** - making excuses, gives the impression that you actually would like to say “yes” if it was not for these “pesky” barriers. This will lead the other party to try and problem solve so that you can carry out their request, therefore making it more difficult to say no in the long run.

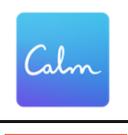
We can all be more assertive at different times and in different situations. Take the time to think about situations which make it more difficult for you to be assertive, any particular people? Are you experiencing any personal negative beliefs about being assertive? Now try to think about how you can become more assertive in these situations, what skills could you use? What could you say to yourself?

Remember assertiveness can be difficult; however it is a skill that can be practiced and learned. Becoming more assertive impacts positively on both our physical and psychological wellbeing, as it reduces stress, improves relationships and increases confidence and self-esteem.

Our recommended resources (click for direct access):

NHS Inform	Offers the most up-to-date advice on dealing varying mental health difficulties, including the 5 Steps to Mental Wellbeing. Please visit: NHS Inform
Wellbeing	Our website offers a variety of self-help materials, groups, and courses for all sorts of problems that you may be facing. Anyone can download the self- help materials. Please visit: Wellbeing Website Glasgow
Mental Health Foundation	A range of content designed to give you more information about mental health and to help you to look after your mental health. Please visit: Your Mental Health - Mental Health Foundation
NHS Every Mind Matters	Interactive website providing you the opportunity to complete a short quiz which creates a Mind Plan of what you can do to improve your mental health. Please visit: Every Mind Matters
Psych Central	Run by mental health professionals offering reliable, trusted information to individuals struggling with a mental health. There is also an excellent quiz section allowing you to find out more about your symptoms and how to manage these. Please visit: PsychCentral for Mental Health
MIND	Information hub provides advice on how to support your mental wellbeing. Please visit: MIND Information Hub
SAMH	Hub of information and guidance about looking after mental health. Please visit: SAMH Guidance for Mental Health

Useful Apps:

	Mind Shift	Rather than trying to avoid anxious feelings, Mind Shift stresses the importance of changing how you think about anxiety. It can encourage you to take charge of your life, ride out intense emotions, and face challenging situations
	SAM	SAM might be perfect for you if you're interested in self-help, but meditation isn't your thing. Users are prompted to build their own 24-hour anxiety toolkit that allows you to track anxious thoughts and behaviour over time and learn 25 different self-help techniques.
	Happify	Need a happy fix? With its psychologist-approved mood-training program, the Happify app is your fast-track to a good mood. Try various engaging games, activity suggestions, gratitude prompts and more to train your brain as if it were a muscle, to overcome negative thoughts
	Headspace	The Headspace app makes meditation simple. Learn the skills of mindfulness and meditation by using this app for just a few minutes per day. You gain access to hundreds of meditations on everything from stress and anxiety to sleep and focus.
	Calm	Calm provides people experiencing stress and anxiety with guided meditations, sleep stories, breathing programs, and relaxing music.
	Smiling Mind	Smiling mind is a way to practice daily meditation and mindfulness exercises from any device. This is helpful during times of stress and is a fun and unique way to help you put a smile on your mind.