

The art of saying no!

The path to assertive behaviour



This is assertiveness



Your colleague asks for help when you're extremely busy. Someone doesn't stick to their work agreements, so you have to take up extra work. Your team member takes credit for work you've done. All these situations require an assertive response.

Assertiveness means standing up for yourself in your relationships with others. You protect your own interests and boundaries by being clear but tactful about what you do and do not want. This sets clear expectations. Others gain clarity about

your position and you, in turn, show respect for the other person. The result is a positive discussion experience for both parties. Isn't that wonderful? However, it can be a challenge for many people. Some may have a more natural talent for it than others. The good news is that anyone can develop more assertiveness. Wondering how? Let our e-book be your guide!

*Saying no to others is
saying yes to yourself*

Types of behaviour



Do you know this feeling? You start by trying to delicately express what you don't feel comfortable with by saying, "I completely understand that your time is limited, and this may not be your top priority, but could you please take a moment to complete your tasks?"

You do this a few times, but it doesn't seem to have much effect. This is what we call subassertive behaviour. You allow the other person to overstep your boundaries and let them decide how to respond to your request.

By doing this, you allow them to fill in the blanks and prioritise their needs over yours.
At some point, you've had

enough. That's when you suddenly lose your temper and say, "I'm fed up with you never doing what I ask. It's absolutely unacceptable!" This is aggressive behaviour. You are overstepping the other person's boundaries, perhaps being domineering or bossy, and you won't tolerate any objections. You may even be dictating what the other person should do.

Ideally, you want to find a middle ground. You want to express what you expect from the other person in a friendly

but clear and effective way. That's right, this is assertive behaviour. You take responsibility for your own needs, decisions, and opinions, while recognising that the other person should do the same. You respect both your own and the other person's boundaries.

Speak up

In our training sessions, 80% of participants find it challenging to express themselves. If you don't have a clear understanding of your own thoughts and feelings, it's difficult to expect others to consider your perspective. What do you want, believe, and feel? Take a moment to think about this. Then express these things openly.



Don't argue



So, you want to speak up, but how? The Asserting communication style from our Influence Model® provides guidance. You communicate your needs, standards, limits, and expectations in the right tone. You express yourself clearly without being aggressive. Needs are personal, not purely rational. That's why you try to avoid arguing, which gives the impression that you're open to debate.

Take the example of a colleague who is often late. After a few gentle reminders, you decide to be more explicit: *"I'd appreciate it if you could be there at 9 am next time when our meeting starts."* If you add: *"Because right now we're all waiting for you".*

You are giving the other person a reason to argue back. They might respond with: *"Oh, come on, you don't have to wait. Just start without me!"* And before you know it, you're in a discussion you'd rather avoid. So, swallow your arguments!

*Sometimes, it's better
to use a full stop
instead of a comma.*



Make it concrete and specific

The more specific you are when addressing (negative) behaviour, the better.

So instead of saying:

"I feel like you don't take me seriously".

Say:

"I don't like it when you interrupt me".

Avoid vague or softening language. Here are some tips:

- Avoid words like *'always'* and *'never'*; you're talking about a specific situation.
- Talk in terms of *'I'* and *'you'*. For example, don't say *"We think it's important for everyone to be on time"*, say *"I would appreciate it if you could be on time next time"*.
- Using uncertain language also makes you seem less firm. Watch out for words like *'actually'* and *'try'*. Be clear and straightforward to get your point across effectively.

Watch your body language

A confident posture can go a long way. It starts with paying attention to how you present yourself physically. Pay attention to your non-verbal communication. Make eye contact; it shows respect for the other person. Avoid having your hands in your pockets and adopt a firm and active posture with a straight back. Emphasise key words with subtle hand gestures; this reinforces your message. Now the other person can't ignore you.



Responding at the right time

Responding promptly is good practice, but sometimes you may not know what to say "in the heat of the moment". It's only afterwards that you realise you wanted to set a limit. That's OK. You can always bring it up later if someone says or does something that makes you feel uncomfortable.

However, try not to avoid the person; make sure you confront them within a week. It can be nerve-wracking, especially if you're worried that it will put a strain on your relationship. But in the long run it's harmful to keep things to yourself. Besides, it doesn't feel good to keep replaying the other person's actions in your mind.

This also applies to other indirect incidents. If you hear something unpleasant through someone else, approach or call the person directly:
"I heard from [...] that you disagree with how I handle [...]. Is that true?"



Take control

Do you feel that you still have a long way to go? Becoming assertive doesn't happen overnight. Give yourself time; it's a skill you need to develop. That means you'll need to practice a lot to make it second nature.

Take an active approach by working with our experienced trainers and other professionals. Learn how your behaviour affects others with our Positive Power and Influence® training. Discover how speaking up can give you peace of mind while providing clarity for others. Experience the benefits of setting your boundaries effectively.

[Explore our trainings](#)



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