

# Assertive Responses

People relate to one another in different ways. Look at the following styles of communication. Do you recognize any of these in yourself?

- **Aggressive communication.** You tend to force your feelings and opinions on to other people.
- **Passive communication.** You allow other people to dominate with their views and find it difficult to stand up for your opinion.
- **Assertive communication.** You respect the rights and opinions of others, and you can express your own opinions, feelings, and desires.

Relating to other people passively or aggressively often leads to problems. Communicating assertively can help you build healthy relationships, feel empowered, increase your self-esteem, and get your needs met.



## How could this tool help me?

- It will help you to notice aggressive and assertive styles of communication.
- You can use it to practice responding assertively in difficult situations (e.g., when you disagree with someone) or set boundaries when your point of view isn't being respected by another person (e.g., ending the conversation respectfully).
- Practicing being assertive in safe but challenging situations can make it easier to do in the 'real world'.



## How should I use it?

- Find someone to practice assertiveness exercises with. This could be a therapist, a trusted friend, or a family member.
- Take it in turns to read the aggressive statements to one another, and practice responding assertively.
- You can use the suggested statements or practice making up your own (remember to keep these statements focused and respectful).
- After practicing, reflect on how it felt to be assertive. Was the interaction different to the ones you've had in the past?



## Helpful tips

- Assertive communication is a skill that can feel unnatural at first, particularly if it's new to you. Don't give yourself a hard time if you find it difficult: the more you practice, the easier and more natural it will become.
- Remember that assertive communication is both verbal and non-verbal. Practice being assertive with your words and body – maintain eye contact with the other person, keep your voice steady, and ensure your posture is upright and relaxed (no slouching!).
- If you can't practice with someone else, you can still use this tool on your own. Sit in one chair and make an aggressive statement. Then, move to a second chair and practice responding assertively.
- Feedback can fine-tune your assertiveness. Try recording yourself being assertive and listen back as if you were a non-judgmental observer. How could you do it better next time?

**Assertive Responses**  
Aggressiveness is disrespectful. People are being verbally aggressive when they express opinions, feelings, or desires in ways that disrespect or violate the rights of others.

Assertiveness is the opposite of aggression. Assertive responses are ones which express our opinions, feelings, or desires in ways which respect the rights and opinions of others. Assertiveness is a way of getting your needs satisfied, not tolerating disrespect, and becoming empowered.

If someone talks to you in an aggressive way it is better to focus on the style of their message, not its content.  
• Do let the speaker know that they are talking to you disrespectfully  
• Do not enter into a conversation about the issue they are raising

**Assertive responses exercise**  
For this exercise find someone you can practice with - a friend, partner, or relative. Take it in turns to say aggressive statements to one another and practice responding assertively. You can start with the statements below and then practice making up your own.

**Aggressive statements**  
• "You don't know what you're talking about!"  
• "Why are you being so defensive?"  
• "Why are you being such a coward?"  
• "You're being so manipulative!"  
• "That's so stupid, why don't you do it this way?"  
• "It's almost as if you don't want to get over it!"  
• "Don't be such an idiot!"  
• "What's wrong with you?"  
• "You're such a clever wordy."

**Assertive statements**  
• "That's a really hurtful thing to say"  
• "I'm sorry when you say that"  
• "I appreciate it if you didn't speak to me like that"  
• "I appreciate it if you would lower your voice"  
• "I'm sorry if you didn't hear me that way"  
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#### Aggressive statements

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- *"It's almost as if you don't want to get over it"*
- *"Don't be such an idiot"*
- *"What's wrong with you?"*
- *"You're such a <swear word>"*

#### Assertive statements

- *"That's a really hurtful thing to say"*
- *"It hurts me when you say that"*
- *"I would appreciate it if you didn't speak to me like that"*
- *"I would appreciate it if you would lower your voice"*
- *"Could you please try asking me that another way?"*
- *"I don't appreciate being spoken to that way"*
- *"I don't deserve to be spoken to that way"*
- *"I think your intentions are good, but saying that does not help me"*
- *"I don't like to be labeled"*

#### Assertive "If ... then ..." statements

- *"If you are going to keep saying unkind things then I'm going to end this conversation"*
- *"If you are going to continue speaking to me like that then I'm going to walk away"*
- *"If you will not change the subject then I would prefer that you leave me alone"*
- *"If you stop saying things like that then we will have a better relationship"*