



ASSERTIVENESS

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What is Assertiveness?

When we think about what we mean by an assertive person, we may consider somebody who is “pushy”, able to get their own way, able to make other people do what he or she wants. Probably this is not what most of us want to be like and is not the idea of assertiveness talked about in this leaflet.

Being assertive is more likely to mean:

- Expecting to be treated with respect and expecting to meet other people in the same way
- Being able to ask for what you want and have your request taken seriously
- Being able to have your opinions heard as well as being prepared to listen to those of other people
- Recognising that you have the right to say “no” without feeling guilty
- Not needing to feel a responsibility for problems which belong to others
- Being able to say if you don’t understand something

When might I want to assert myself?

- Have you ever listened politely to a request, agreed to do what has been asked of you, and then felt angry with yourself for agreeing?
- Do you sometimes get asked to do things which you believe are not your responsibility, agree to do them and then feel deeply resentful because you were asked?
- Has somebody criticised you in a situation in

which you feel you are not allowed to explain your actions or ask for help?

- Has anybody treated you in an impolite and disrespectful way, perhaps in front of other people, and you have felt unable to respond?
- Does anybody ever call you by a name or nickname which you hate, but you don’t know how to tell them to stop?

These are just some of the situations in which you may want to be more assertive about your rights and be protective of your feelings.

What can I do?

First of all imagine yourself in one of the situations which is difficult for you. Ask yourself:

- What is it about this situation which makes me feel fearful or intimidated, or angry?
- Can I recognise where those feelings come from?
- What do I really want to do in this situation?

e.g. Say “no”
Say what I really feel
Acknowledge my lack of understanding
etc

Remember that it is only your own behaviour or attitudes which you can do something about.

Having recognised what you want or don’t want you can now try to practice some strategies which may help you in dealing with other people and situations.



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EXAMPLE 1 In this example you are being asked yet again to do something which is unreasonable but which you find hard to refuse. Try to put into words for yourself what it is:

- You really want or
- What you are prepared to do or
- What you want the other person to do (or stop doing)

The strategy is to be able to say this over and over again to the other person until you have had your needs met or until some sort of acceptable compromise has been reached. For example, suppose you are being asked yet again to miss your dinner hour to “fill a gap” in the office. The statement you have decided upon is

I can't do it today because I have made alternative arrangements.

Each time the other person brings up a reason why you should comply with them, you may acknowledge their difficulties but come back again and again to your own statement.

EXAMPLE 2 This is a little bit more complicated and can be used when you wish to make a specific request or complain about somebody's behaviour or attitude towards you. It requires you to work out a “script” which will:

- Explain, very briefly and clearly, the situation which is causing problems

- Set out your own feelings about it
- Say very directly (and briefly) what needs to happen
- Set out decisively the outcome (for the other person) if your stated needs are not met

For example:

Yesterday, in the office, you complained about me in full view of everybody, This made me feel very angry and resentful. In future, please talk to me in a private place. If you do that there is a chance that I shall be able to listen and take in what you are trying to say.

Getting Help

When you are trying to change your behaviour in the ways described above, it can be helpful to talk things through with another person. Your lack of assertiveness may have developed out of situations which you have found difficult or intimidating in the past.

Alternatively, it may also be useful to talk about the fears and anxieties which can contribute to a lack of assertiveness. Of course, you may just want to practice the new approach by developing strategies and scripts which fit the situations you are facing.

In addition to your usual sources of support from home and work, counselling is available on **0151 330 8103**

www.mersecarewellbeingatwork.co.uk/staff-support-services