

Assertiveness

“Assertiveness” is a skilful middle path communication practice that flows from awareness of our true worth and of our interconnectedness with others. It recognises the equality of self and others –that our own worth is equal to that of others –and the need for both self respect and respect for others.

Assertiveness is a form of communication characterized by a confident and positive declaration of one’s rights or point of view without either aggressively threatening the rights of another or submissively permitting another to ignore or deny one's rights or point of view.

Passive communicators do not defend their own personal boundaries and thus allow aggressive people to abuse or manipulate them through fear. Passive communicators are also typically not likely to risk trying to influence anyone else.

Aggressive people do not respect the personal boundaries of others and thus are liable to harm others while trying to influence them.

A person communicates assertively by overcoming fear of speaking one’s mind or fear of trying to influence others. Assertive people are also willing to defend themselves against aggressive people.

Assertive communication consists of sharing wants and needs honestly in a safe manner. This presumes respect for the boundaries of oneself and others, including boundaries of the physical self, possessions, and relationships. It also presumes an interest in the fulfillment of needs and wants through cooperation.

Assertive communication is the behavioural middle ground, between ineffective passive and aggressive responses. Such communication emphasizes expressing feelings forthrightly, but in a way that will not spiral into aggression. If others' actions threaten one's boundaries, one communicates this to prevent escalation.

In contrast, aggressive communication judges, threatens, lies, breaks confidences, stonewalls, and violates others' boundaries.

At the opposite end is passive communication. Victims may passively permit others to violate their boundaries. At a later time, they may come back and attack with a sense of righteous indignation.

Assertive communication attempts to transcend these extremes by appealing to the shared interest of all parties; it focuses on the issue, not the person.

Assertive people

- Feel free to express their feelings, thoughts, and desires.
- Tend to have good self-esteem.
- Are able to initiate and maintain comfortable relationships with others.
- Know their rights.
- Have control over their anger.
- Are willing to compromise with others, rather than always wanting their own way.
- Enter friendships with an appreciation of the needs of both sides.