



## 2. Assertiveness

### 2.1 What is Assertiveness?

Assertiveness is the ability to express your feelings, opinions, beliefs, and needs, directly, openly and honestly, while not violating the personal rights of others. Being assertive does not imply being aggressive, which doesn't take other's thoughts or rights into consideration.

Assertiveness is foremost the ability to communicate your thoughts, feelings and opinions in a manner promoting a respectful dialogue. Some examples of assertive communication include "I feeling messages" (to describe the situation, express how you feel, give specific suggestions and suggest compromises or consequences), "basic assertion" such as refusing, accepting or making simple requests ("Thank you but I am not hungry", "Could you please explain the question?") and expressing a preference or opinion ("I prefer live music over watching a movie").

Assertive skills are distinct from assertiveness. "Aggressive" and "passive" forms of communication. A loud or yelling voice, name calling, being demanding or putting someone down are examples of an "aggressive" approach. Most often the other person will feel disrespected, attacked and defensive. Likewise, not sharing your feelings is considered "passive" or non-assertive and the other person may feel excluded from both the opportunity to understand your feelings and how to respond to your concerns. In many situations assertive, aggressive and passive communication styles are not mutually exclusive. They can be appropriate choices used together or alone, depending on cultural norms and situations. Assertive communication, on the other hand, is the preferred method for effective communication. Developing assertiveness may help:

- Developing communication skills
- Increasing self-esteem
- Allowing to feel self-confident
- Assisting others in gaining respect
- Improving decision-making ability

One of the challenges that international students face is assertiveness. Learn more about adjusting as an international student by reading our health topic on International Students.

### 2.2 The Language of Assertiveness

Here are some suggestions of assertiveness language to consider:

- Use "I feeling messages" such as *"I think... I feel... I want..."*
- Listen to what others have to say before repeating your own thoughts, opinions, and needs.
- Use statements of Personal Reference and Personal Meaning: *"This is the way I see it..." "In my opinion..." "This is how I feel..." "This is what it means to me..."*
- Respond to what the other person is saying and ask for clarification before assuming you understand what he or she means.
- Use statements offering compromise
- Take some time to think, know what you want to be different, or think of compromise by asking for time, such as *"I'd like to discuss this in an hour"*



- **AVOID** demanding and blaming statements

### 2.2.1 Practice Assertive Communication

- Express an opinion, thought or feeling: "I thought today's lecture was really interesting!" "I felt anxious about the questions on the exam"
- Combine a simple and direct request with an opinion, thought or feeling: "Professor Jones, I enjoyed today's lecture but I was (feeling) confused about the math equation. Would you be able to review this equation with me?"
- Practice expressing more difficult emotions with "I feeling messages" or the DESC approach: Describe the situation, express how you feel, specific suggestions and/or compromises, continued communication or consequences.
- Express simple requests: "May I have a copy of the syllabus?" "Can you (please) direct me to the Financial Aid Office?"
- Be considerate of the time, place, and manner in which you approach the listener. For example, informing your roommate you would like to discuss something at dinner is better than trying to share your concerns as they head for an exam.
- When speaking to someone, make direct, appropriate eye contact. This can vary with cultures so observing others who appear to be successful with these skills can help. Also, speak clearly and audibly without raising your voice but expression of emotion is normal. Remember, we also communicate by our behaviour, facial expressions and voice tone!
- Create a hierarchy or steps from least intimidating situation to increasingly challenging situations where you may practice your assertive skills. An example may be using a simple request, asking a question at your instructor's office hour and gaining confidence to follow a comment in class with your affirmation or opinion of what another student just shared.



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