

Learn Assertive Communication in Five Simple Steps

Assertive communication can strengthen your relationships, reducing stress from conflict and providing you with social support when facing difficult times. A polite but assertive [‘no’](#) to excessive requests from others will enable you to avoid overloading your schedule and promote balance in your life. Assertive communication can also help you handle difficult family, friends and co-workers more easily, reducing drama and stress.

Here's How:

1. When approaching someone about behavior you'd like to see changed, stick to factual descriptions of what they've done that's upset you, rather than labels or judgments.

Here's an example:

Situation:

Your friend, who habitually arrives late for your plans, has shown up twenty minutes late for a lunch date.

Inappropriate: "You're so rude! You're always late."

Assertive Communication: "We were supposed to meet at 11:30, but now it's 11:50."

2. The same should be done if describing the effects of their behavior. Don't exaggerate, label or judge; just describe:

Inappropriate: "Now lunch is ruined."

Assertive Communication: "Now I have less time to spend lunching because I still need to be back to work by 1pm."

3. Use "I Messages". Simply put, if you start a sentence off with "You", it comes off as more of a judgment or attack, and puts people on the defensive. If you start with "I", the focus is more on how you are feeling and how you are affected by their behavior. Also, it shows more ownership of your reactions, and less blame.

For example:

'You Message': "You need to stop that!"
'I Message': "I'd like it if you'd stop that."

4. Here's a great formula that puts it all together:

"When you [their behavior], I feel [your feelings]."

When used with factual statements, rather than judgments or labels, this formula provides a direct, non-attacking, more responsible way of letting people know how their behavior affects you. For example:

"When you yell, I feel attacked."

5. A more advanced variation of this formula includes the results of their behavior (again, put into factual terms), and looks like this:

"When you [their behavior], then [results of their behavior], and I feel [how you feel]."

Here are some examples:

"When you arrive late, I have to wait, and I feel frustrated."

"When you tell the kids they can do something that I've already forbidden, some of my authority as a parent is taken away, and I feel undermined."

Tips:

1. Make sure your body reflects confidence: stand up straight, look people in the eye, and relax.
2. Use a firm, but pleasant, tone.
3. Don't assume you know what the other person's motives are, especially if you think they're negative.
4. When in a discussion, don't forget to listen and ask questions! It's important to understand the other person's point of view as well.
5. Try to think win-win: see if you can find a compromise or a way for you both get your needs met.