

Does this sound like you?

- You rarely express your opinion, especially if others may disagree
- You say “yes” to others’ requests when you would really like to say “no”
- You are hesitant to ask for help
- You have a hard time letting others know you are upset, even if it is justified
- You sometimes feel taken advantage of by others
- You are hesitant to ask questions when you are confused
- You have a hard time speaking up in class
- You go along with what your friends or family want you to do rather than telling them what you would like to do

What is assertiveness?

Assertiveness involves feeling free to express your opinion and stand up for yourself. Assertiveness involves communicating in a way that is honest and to the point. When people act assertively, they say what they want to say, but without hurting someone else.

Many people who are concerned with being assertive feel they are too passive, and they have a difficult time expressing their opinions and standing up for themselves. Sometimes people don’t act assertively because they are afraid of being rejected or put down, or they are afraid they’ll hurt someone else’s feelings.

Failing to be assertive can lead to feeling hurt, angry, or resentful. It can also have a negative impact on self-esteem and lead to one’s needs not being met.

How does assertiveness differ from aggression?

Assertiveness respects the rights of others, while aggression violates the rights of others. Assertiveness lies on a continuum between passiveness and aggression. When people are too passive, their own rights are violated, but when they are too aggressive, others’ rights are violated. Assertiveness is the middle ground that can be used to maintain respect for the rights of everyone.

How can I be more assertive?

- Identify your rights, needs and wants before you speak
- Identify how you feel about the situation
- Use “I” statements: “I feel ____, when you ____, because ____.”
- Be direct, clear, and specific
- Don’t make assumptions about others’ thoughts and feelings
- Ask for feedback
- Avoid feeling guilty for expressing yourself
- Don’t passively agree by nodding and smiling if you don’t agree
- Maintain eye contact, speak calmly, and relax

Can a counselor help me?

Sometimes becoming more assertive is a difficult change to make. A counselor can help you identify ways to make sure that your needs and feelings are respected while still respecting the needs and feelings of others.