



University Counselling

Being assertive

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Assertiveness is the ability to express your thoughts and feelings appropriately, openly and honestly, as well as listening to what others have to say. It is an effective style of communication which lets others know your point of view, the impact it is having on you and the outcome you would like from a situation.

It is a useful skill to use at university and in your personal and working life to get your message across in a non-offensive way and to ensure that you are heard.

Tips for being assertive

- Be aware of your thoughts, feelings, beliefs and rights. You have the right to these.
- Decide what to do or say - some examples might be whether to speak or not, to consult a supervisor, to let it go, or any other activity. The key is to choose.
- Choose the right time to speak about your feelings. If your anger is boiling or the other person's anger is boiling you may want to come back to the situation once you are calmer and better able to express yourself.
- If you choose to speak up, communicate without blame by:
 - o Choosing your time carefully. Make sure the time to talk suits all parties. For example, if someone is watching their favourite TV show, it would not be a good time.
 - o Using 'I' statements – speak for yourself, state your own position. “I feel insignificant when you talk over me, so please wait until I have finished speaking” is an assertive statement, where as “Stop always talking over me!” is an aggressive one.
 - o Being congruent – match your body language with what you are saying. Don't say “I'm listening” while you are crossing your arms defensively.
 - o If you notice that things start to get tense, or you or the other person is becoming angry then use a time-out and come back to the discussion after you have calmed down. You might want to go for a walk or do an activity to help you to let off some steam. See our 'Grounding Techniques' tip sheet for some strategies.
- Be prepared to listen to the other person and acknowledge their feelings. Remember feelings are never right or wrong and everyone is entitled to feel the way that they do.
- Be prepared to negotiate, depending on the seriousness of the behaviour and the nature of the relationship. It is not appropriate to negotiate or tolerate violent behaviour.
- You may be more prepared to negotiate in a close relationship than in a casual one.

To learn some skills in assertiveness or other helpful skills contact University Counselling.