

Assertive Communication Techniques Handout

What is assertive communication?



Assertive communication is a style of communication where you express your thoughts, feelings, needs, and rights openly, honestly, and respectfully, without violating the rights of others. It strikes a balance between passive and aggressive communication, allowing you to advocate for yourself in a confident and positive way while also respecting the views and boundaries of others.

Assertive Communication Techniques

Here are key Assertive Communication Techniques that help in expressing yourself clearly and confidently while maintaining respect for others:

Use "I" statements to express your feelings

When discussing your emotions or concerns, use "I" statements to focus on how you feel in a specific situation. This approach shifts the conversation away from blaming or accusing the other person and helps them better understand your perspective.

Example: Instead of saying, "You never listen," which might cause defensiveness, say, "I feel unheard when I try to explain my point, and the conversation quickly shifts."



Clearly state your needs

It's important not to assume the other person knows what you need or expect from them. Be specific and direct about how you would like things to change or improve. Guesswork can lead to misunderstandings and unmet expectations, which can further complicate the situation.

Example: "I would like you to call ahead of time if you know you're going to be late." This simple but direct request eliminates ambiguity and creates a clear action plan for the future.



Keep the conversation present-focused

Avoid dwelling on past issues or using broad statements like “you always” or “you never,” as these can quickly escalate the conflict and make the other person feel attacked or cornered. Instead, address one issue at a time, focusing on what is happening now.

Example: Instead of saying, “You always forget to call,” you could say, “Right now, it’s important to me that we maintain better communication moving forward.”



Practice positive non-verbal communication

Your body language and tone play a critical role in how your message is received. Calmly deliver your message while maintaining an open, non-confrontational posture. This can include sitting or standing up straight, keeping a relaxed expression, and making direct but not intense eye contact.

Example: If you're sitting during the conversation, sit up straight and maintain a calm, steady tone, signaling that you're open to discussion and resolution.



The XYZ* formula for assertive communication

The XYZ* formula for assertive communication is a simple and effective technique for expressing your feelings and needs clearly while avoiding blame or hostility. It follows a structure that helps you convey your message in a non-confrontational way by describing the behavior, its impact on you, and what you want or need.

I feel X	when you do Y	in situation Z	and I would like*
I feel frustrated	when you interrupt me	during our team meetings	and I would like you to let me finish speaking before sharing your thoughts.
I feel unappreciated	when you don't acknowledge my efforts	after I've gone out of my way to help you with a task	and I would like you to recognize my contributions with a simple thank you.
I feel hurt	when you cancel plans at the last minute	especially when I've been looking forward to spending time together	and I would like more notice if you need to change our plans

Additional notes

Center for Integrated Health. (2013). Assertive communication. *In Veterans Affairs*. https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/coe/cih-visn2/Documents/Patient_Education_Handouts/Assertive_Communication_Version_3.pdf

Cornell Health. (n.d.). *Assertive communication assertive communication tips*. <https://health.cornell.edu/sites/health/files/pdf-library/assertive-communication-skills.pdf>

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