
Assert Yourself and Ask for Help!



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- ◆ Explain how assertive communication is different than passive or aggressive communication.
- ◆ Describe how assertive communication can help you reduce stress and prevent burnout.
- ◆ Identify 6 strategies to communicate more assertively.
- ◆ Use assertive communication to ask for help when you need it.

What is Assertive Communication and Why is it Important?

Assertive communication involves mutual respect. It allows you to express your feelings, thoughts, and beliefs in a clear and direct way, while also respecting others.

Other types of communication, like passiveness or aggressiveness, don't involve mutual respect.

Passive Communication	Assertive Communication	Aggressive Communication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Expressing yourself in an apologetic way. ◆ Not sharing what you really think. ◆ Not respecting your own thoughts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Clear messages. ◆ Firm and direct. ◆ Sharing your own thoughts AND respecting others' thoughts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Expressing yourself inappropriately. ◆ May be seen as attacking or explosive. ◆ Not respecting others' thoughts.
<i>Less effective</i>	<i>Most effective</i>	<i>Less effective</i>

Assertive communication is an important caregiving skill. Becoming more comfortable asking for help, saying no, and expressing your own needs can help reduce your stress. It can also increase your self-esteem and help you gain respect from others!

Assertive Communication Techniques

Below are simple and effective techniques to help you communicate more assertively.

- ◆ **Use “I” statements:** This allows you to tell the other person how you feel without placing blame. It also lets you take responsibility for your own feelings. For example, instead of saying “*You never help out with dinner*” you could say, “*I feel frustrated when I have to prepare dinner on my own every night because I have many other things to do.*”

- ◆ **State facts, not judgments:** Instead of saying “*You’re making the bathroom an unsafe place for grandpa*” you could say, “*I noticed the bathroom cupboards were left unlocked. It’s dangerous to leave the cupboards unlocked because there are strong medications that grandpa could misuse if he gets confused.*”
- ◆ **Avoid using “should”:** Instead of saying “*I’m very busy today. You should really help me with tonight’s dinner*” you could say, “*I will need help with tonight’s dinner because I also have to pick up the dry-cleaning this afternoon.*”
- ◆ **Show empathy:** Assertive communication requires you to respect others. Try to understand where the other person is coming from. It is as simple as saying something like “*I understand that you are having difficulty completing the application form for respite services, but it is due in two days. Would you like to call me to discuss the areas you are having difficulty with?*”
- ◆ **Use an assertive tone:** It’s not just about what you say, but about *how* you say it! Use a firm and relaxed voice and match the volume to the situation. Try not to be too loud or too quiet.
- ◆ **Use assertive body language:** body language is an important part of communication. Try to face the person directly, stand or sit up straight, and make eye contact.



How to Say “No” Assertively

Learning how to say “no” is an important way to respect your own limits, prevent burnout, and reduce stress. Many people find it difficult to say “no” because they think it is rude and they don’t want to upset the other person. Try to remember that saying “no” is simply declining a request. It does not mean you are rejecting the person making the request.

Below are some examples of different ways to say “no”. Regardless of which strategy you choose, try to keep it straightforward, brief, and polite.

1. Reflecting

This strategy involves acknowledging the person's request before saying no. For example: *"I know you want to talk to me about organizing mom's birthday party, but I can't make it today"*.

2. Reasoning

This strategy involves giving a short, unapologetic reason for why you are saying no. For example: *"I can't make it today because I have to bake cookies for the school bake sale tomorrow"*.

3. Postponing

This strategy involves declining the request in the current moment but leaving room to say yes in the future. Only use it if you genuinely want to say yes. For example: *"I can't meet with you today, but I can meet with you on Friday"*.

4. Inquiring

This strategy involves declining the current request but finding another request you can say yes to. For example: *"That venue is out of my budget. Are there any other venues you like for mom's birthday party?"*

5. Repeating

This strategy involves simply repeating the word "no" over and over again if someone is making persistent requests. You do not need to give any explanation.

How to Ask for Help Using Assertive Communication

Asking for help is not a sign of weakness. Asking for help assertively without apologizing for it is a sign of strength that says, “I value myself and I value your help”. Below are some examples of assertive ways to ask for help:

Ask for help using assertive communication techniques

Use assertive communication techniques, like using “I” statements, showing empathy, and using assertive tones and body language when making your request. For example, you could say: *“I have been feeling stressed about getting all of mom’s errands done throughout the week. I understand that you are busy, but I need help. How can we make this work?”*. Be prepared to have a discussion with the person until you are both satisfied!

Ask for help with specific tasks

Instead of asking someone to simply help out once in a while, tell them exactly what you need help with. Try saying something like *“Could you pick up mom’s medications from the pharmacy this weekend?”*

It is also a good idea to come up with a list of tasks you need help with, like laundry, errands, or visiting with your loved one so that you can take care of yourself. If you do this, the next time someone says, “Let me know if there’s anything I can do to help”, you will have a whole list they could pick from!

Ask for help on a schedule

If you have friends or family that help out every once in a while, ask them if they would be willing to create a schedule of when they are able to help.

By agreeing on a schedule or routine, you will know when to expect help. Knowing when to expect help can help you plan when you will be able to accomplish other tasks on your to-do list or simply schedule in some self-care time.

Assertiveness Requires Practice

Assertive communication is a valuable skill to have. However, just like any other skill, it requires practice! Don't be discouraged if you don't get it exactly right on your first try.



QUIZ

1. Dante is the primary caregiver for his sister, Natasha. Dante's other siblings help out by taking turns buying Natasha's groceries. One of Dante's siblings asks him if he can get the groceries this week. What is the most assertive way for Dante to say no?
 - A. "I do most of the caregiving duties for Natasha. I shouldn't have to do the groceries."
 - B. "I can't get the groceries today because I am taking Natasha to her dentist appointment."
 - C. "Why? I never get help with any of my tasks!"
 - D. Ignoring the request.

(Continued)



QUIZ

2. Dante is practicing his assertive communication skills and knows that body language is an important part of this. Which of the following is NOT assertive body language?
 - A. Making eye contact
 - B. Facing the person directly
 - C. Crossing arms
 - D. Standing or sitting up straight

3. Dante is feeling overwhelmed with his caregiver duties. Dante's siblings have noticed this and asked him what they can do to help. What is the most assertive way Dante can ask for help?
 - A. "I need help doing Natasha's laundry every Friday night. Are you able to help with laundry on Friday nights?"
 - B. "I need help doing Natasha's errands."
 - C. "If you could pitch in every now and then, that would be great."
 - D. "I need help fixing Natasha's walker."

Answers: 1. B, 2. C, 3. A