

■ Definition

This involves standing up for your personal rights and expressing your thoughts, feelings and beliefs directly, honestly and openly in ways that are respectful of the rights of others. An assertive person acts without undue anxiety or guilt. Assertive people respect themselves and other people and take responsibility for their actions and choices. They recognise their needs and ask openly and directly for what they want. If refused, they may feel saddened, disappointed or inconvenienced, but their self-concept isn't shattered. They are not over-reliant on the approval of others, and feel secure and confident within themselves. Assertive people give the lead to other people as to how they wish to be treated.

■ Message communicated

This is what I think. This is how I feel. This is how I see the situation. How about you? If our needs conflict, I am certainly ready to explore our differences and I may be prepared to compromise.

■ Subconscious thoughts

I won't allow you to take advantage of me and I won't attack you for being who you are.

■ Goal

To communicate clearly, adult to adult.

■ Verbal and non-verbal characteristics

- ◆ Receptive listening
- ◆ Firm, relaxed voice

- ◆ Direct eye contact
- ◆ Erect, balanced, open body stance
- ◆ Voice appropriately loud for the situation
- ◆ 'I' statements ('I like', 'I want', 'I don't like')
- ◆ Cooperative phrases ('What are your thoughts on this?')
- ◆ Emphatic statements of interest ('I would like to. . .')

■ Payoffs

The more you stand up for yourself and act in a manner you respect, the higher your self-esteem. Your chances of getting what you want out of life improve greatly when you let others know what you want and stand up for your own rights and needs. Expressing yourself directly at the time of negative feelings means that resentment is not allowed to build up. Being less preoccupied with self-consciousness and anxiety, and less driven by the needs of self-protection and control, you can see, hear and love others more easily.

■ Price

Friends may have benefited from your non-assertion and may sabotage your newly developed assertion. You are reshaping your beliefs and re-examining values that have been closely held since childhood. This can be frightening. There are no 'tablets of stone' to guarantee an elegant outcome of your efforts. There is often pain involved in being assertive.