

Stress Management: Reducing Stress by Being Assertive

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Introduction

Poor communication is one of the biggest causes of stress at work, school, and home. Being unable to talk about your needs, concerns, and frustrations can create stress. Being assertive helps you communicate without causing stress to yourself and others. Assertiveness is a skill that you can learn and put into practice.

In most cases, being assertive works better than being passive or aggressive. With passive communication, you may not express your opinions, feelings, and needs. With aggressive communication, you honestly state your opinions, feelings, and needs, but you do it at the expense of others.

- Assertive communication means speaking up for yourself in a thoughtful, tactful way. Being assertive helps you express yourself about things that matter to you. This reduces stress by helping you feel more in control of a situation.
- You can use the steps below to help you define a problem, describe it to others, and express your feelings.
- Write out your plan to be more assertive, and get comfortable with it. Practice it out loud so you can hear what your assertive statements sound like.
- To be more assertive, you focus on what you say and how you say it. Using the right body language helps you communicate more assertively.

How can you be more assertive?

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Having an assertive discussion

To be more assertive, focus on what you say and how you say it. You can plan and practice how to be more assertive by following the steps and tips below.

1. **State your concerns.** Start by telling the person what the problem is. Don't assume that he or she already knows about the problem. For example, "I'd like to talk with you about the extra chores I have been doing lately."
2. **Share your feelings** about the situation. Try using "I" statements during this step. This means that you talk about how you felt without making the other person feel blamed. For example, say "I feel frustrated" instead of "You frustrate me."
3. **Propose a solution.** State what it is that you would like to see happen. For example, "I think we can solve this if we write down all the chores that need to be done and then divide them equally between us."
4. **Describe how your solution benefits the other person.** People are more willing to work with you if they get something good from it. And you can show them that you are aware of their needs. When people feel understood or listened to, they are more likely to agree to requests. So you may say, "This way, I will feel less frustrated. You won't hear me nag, and we won't argue all the time."
5. Be prepared to **make a deal.** This doesn't mean giving in. It means discussing with the person other options that could also solve the problem. For example, you may agree that as long as the chores get done, they can be completed when the other person has time to do them.

How to use the steps

To have a good experience carrying out an assertive discussion, it's helpful to do some preparation.

- **Take inventory** of what exactly is bothering you about the person or situation. Try writing out your concerns. Then make a plan by writing one or two sentences for each step above.
- **Stay focused.** Plan to talk about one issue at a time during your discussion. Don't bring up past disagreements and past behavior. They just make it likely that the conversation will lose focus and nothing will be solved.
- **Be confident.** Many people are nervous when they have to talk about conflict, their needs, or requests. It's hard to do. But if you sound confident, you are showing the other person that you mean it. Remember, no one will take you seriously unless you take yourself seriously.
- **Practice** your step-by-step plan alone, and get comfortable with it. You may find that it's easier to write your plan than to practice it out loud. But you'll do better in the real situation if you've heard yourself make these statements before.
- If you can, **practice your plan with a trusted person.** He or she can give you feedback about your message, tone, and body language and about his or her reactions to your request.

Being confident

Body language is the way you sit or stand, move, and use your eyes and hands when you speak. Sometimes when you think you're speaking assertively, your body is sending a different message. That message can get in the way of what you are trying to say. Using the right body language helps you communicate more assertively. Try these five tips:

1. Make eye contact with the person you're talking to. Try to keep your facial expression open and sincere.
2. Sit or stand up tall with a straight back. Speak clearly and firmly.
3. Use your hands and facial expressions to highlight your most important points.
4. Try not to sound as if you're asking a question when you're not.

5. Don't use an apologetic tone of voice.

You'll be more comfortable if you practice these rules in front of a mirror or with a trusted person. When you practice, you can also hear your tone of voice.

Credits for Stress Management: Reducing Stress by Being Assertive

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