

Assertiveness

a Biblical way
to communicate

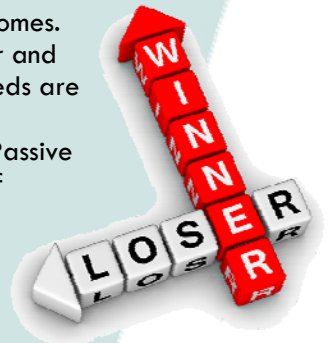


■ by Jessica Parks, MSW, LCSW

People of all ages struggle to communicate effectively, often resulting in broken relationships, poor self-esteem, power struggles, and shame. Assertive communication is a way of speaking with others that clearly shares expectations, needs, and desires. It is based on mutual respect, and insists on the rights of all parties involved. This form of communication promotes healing and mutual benefit.

Most people are not taught to communicate assertively, and thus it is often misunderstood. Assertiveness is NOT:

- Aggressive communication, which seeks to “win” rather than come to mutually-desired outcomes. Aggressive communication ignores the rights of others, and is often selfish. It promotes fear and anger rather than respect and understanding. Aggressive communication assumes your needs are more important than the needs of others.
- Passive communication, which seeks to avoid conflict over obtaining productive outcomes. Passive communication often leads to internal conflict, overcommitment, resentment, and feelings of victimization. Passive communication assumes others’ needs are more important than your own.
- Passive-aggressive communication, which is dishonest about desires, seeks to “get back” at others while avoiding directly addressing the problem.



Communicating assertively insists that the rights of every party involved are honored. Inherent in this style of communicating is the idea that all people are entitled to respect, and all people have a right to hold and communicate opinion. Assertiveness promotes respect and shows consideration to all involved. It can reduce overcommitment if a person struggles with saying “no.” It increases self-esteem and understanding of the wants and needs of self and others.

Assertive communication increases satisfaction and likelihood of achieving goals. By using assertive communication techniques, you are more likely to achieve a desired outcome because your wants and needs are more clearly understood. In addition, people are more likely to listen attentively and respond positively if they feel their needs and desires are also being respected, which is a product of assertive communication.

Article continued on reverse side...

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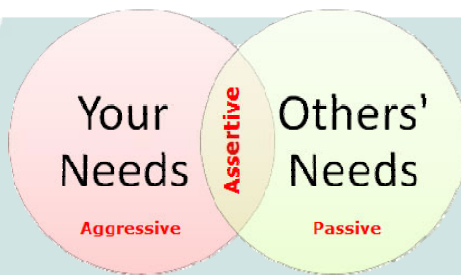
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Continued from reverse side...

Communicating assertively can be difficult, and usually takes practice. In general, the following steps should be followed:

1. State the specific situation to which you are referring. Stick to facts (e.g. - "You came home at 9:00pm when you said you would be home at 5:00pm)
2. State your emotional response, or feelings, associated with the situation. (e.g. - "I feel scared when I do not know where you are.") Nobody can argue with your feelings, because they are your own.
3. Clearly state what you need. Do not assume others know this. Be as specific as possible. (e.g. - "I would like for you to call when you will be late coming home.") Note: this step can request something, or it can refuse something. In both cases, you are stating what you need.
4. State what the benefit will be for both parties if your needs are met. (e.g. - "It is important to me that we communicate. We can both feel more secure in a relationship where we have consistent communication.")



There are several tricks to communicating in an assertive way. It is helpful to use "I" statements (e.g. - "I feel scared when I don't hear from you when you will be late coming home.") so that the other absorbs the information rather than feeling attacked (e.g. - "You made me worry.") Consistency and staying firm are key. Do not apologize. You have a right to request something or refuse something. You may need to repeat yourself, but you are not required to elaborate if you do not feel comfortable doing so.

Communication is made up of both verbal and nonverbal cues. Assertive communication is best done using direct eye contact. Do not look at the floor or the ceiling. It is helpful not to fidget, which makes you look nervous. Do not stick your hands in your pockets or cross your arms. These postures indicate poor self-confidence.

If possible, plan what you will say ahead of time. Do not give in to pressure to change your response. Let your "no" mean "no." If needed, give yourself time to form a response. If somebody asks you to commit to doing something, and you are unsure, you can say something like, "I need some time to consider that. I will get back to you by the end of the day." This shows the person that you respect their request and gives you an opportunity to enter into commitments thoughtfully.

Assertive communication is a Biblical way to communicate. It encourages us to be "quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger" (James 1:19 ESV). When honestly and respectfully communicating with others, deeper understanding and love abound. Assertive communication promotes honesty, respectful language, trust, and mutual edification. Rather than tear down, it equips us to perform healing and reconciliatory work as a community of believers. Like all spiritual disciplines, effective communication requires time to cultivate. Practicing the skills outlined above will be a good place to start.
Begin today; begin with prayer.



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<http://www.chicagochristiancounseling.org/newsletters.html>

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