

Would you perhaps like to be more *Assertive*?

Well let's think for a moment becoming more assertive generally means being able:

- to handle both criticism and compliments with ease
- to ask for what you want clearly and concisely
- to cope better when those requests which are occasionally refused
- to be able to say “no” to others when necessary
- to be able to say “yes” to yourself more often



What does being Assertive involve?

- Respecting yourself - who you are and what you do
- Respecting other people - their different feelings and needs and **their** right to be assertive
- Taking responsibility for yourself, and allowing others to do the same for themselves
- Allowing yourself, and other people, to make minor mistakes occasionally
- Allowing yourself to enjoy your successes
- Allowing yourself to change your mind sometimes, and allowing others to do the same
- Being clear with others about what you feel and what you want
- Asking for “thinking it over” time, rather than being pressed into making immediate decisions
- Setting and keeping clear boundaries, standing firm, compromising or co-operating depending on your assessment of what is appropriate, and allowing others to do the same for themselves

Why is it difficult to be Assertive?

We have all been taught that we need to behave in a certain way in order to be approved of,

whereas actually it is unrealistic to hope to be approved of by everyone we meet. We cause ourselves a lot of emotional distress by unrealistic beliefs like this. For example, we may believe:-

- That in order to like ourselves we must be perfect
- That it is a catastrophe if things do not go exactly according to our plan
- That there is only one right way of doing things
- That we have no control over our feelings
- That because something once affected the way we live, it must do so forever
- That although we prefer people to be straightforward with us, they will be hurt if we are straightforward with them
- That if we ask questions, we are stupid
- That if we say no, no-one will like us

What does being Assertive look like?

Assertive people are generally more relaxed than their passive or aggressive counterparts - they can stand tall and look you in the eye. They make open-handed gestures and pitch their voice to be clearly heard. They tend not to feel they have to “win” all the time and can allow themselves to be vulnerable and take risks. They expect to be taken seriously, when they are being serious. They can also risk laughing at themselves, but tend not to laugh at others.

Assertive people have learned to respect and approve of themselves. They are self-confident and aware of their own needs and feelings. Because they are less hard on themselves, they can also be more aware of the needs and feelings of others. They express both joy and anger appropriate, and because they do not bottle their anger up, they are free of resentments.

How can we become more Assertive?

Trying to change the way you behave, and perhaps have behaved for some time, may not happen overnight. A good self-help book can help. Take into account that the way you behave is based on how you feel in any given situation and how you feel depends on what you are telling yourself about the situation.

Changing the ways in which we talk to ourselves in our heads is not easy and some people will benefit from help and support from others, perhaps a counsellor or coach. Others, however, can make very real progress on their own.