

OTR

ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION

November 2018

WELCOME TO THE OTR GUIDE TO ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION!

At OTR, we think that communication is key. Not only to help us to reach out and connect with others, but also to get our basic needs met. One of the key tools to this is something called 'assertive communication', or 'being assertive.' But what does being assertive even mean?



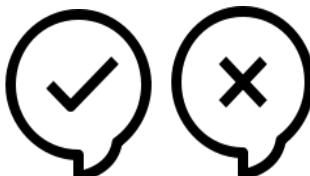
In a nutshell, it means saying what you really think or feel in a confident, non-aggressive way. This can include expressing your own opinions and feelings, saying "no" without feeling guilty, asking for what you want and setting your own boundaries.



This isn't something we are taught growing up. Quite often we are expected to do the opposite - to stay silent or obedient to the people around us and not to state what we really want or feel. As a result we can become afraid of upsetting those around us, and this can end up negatively impacting our lives because we don't feel free to be ourselves.



This booklet is designed to explain the basics of being assertive - what it means, how to do it and why in a simple way. Knowledge is power, and power to the people!

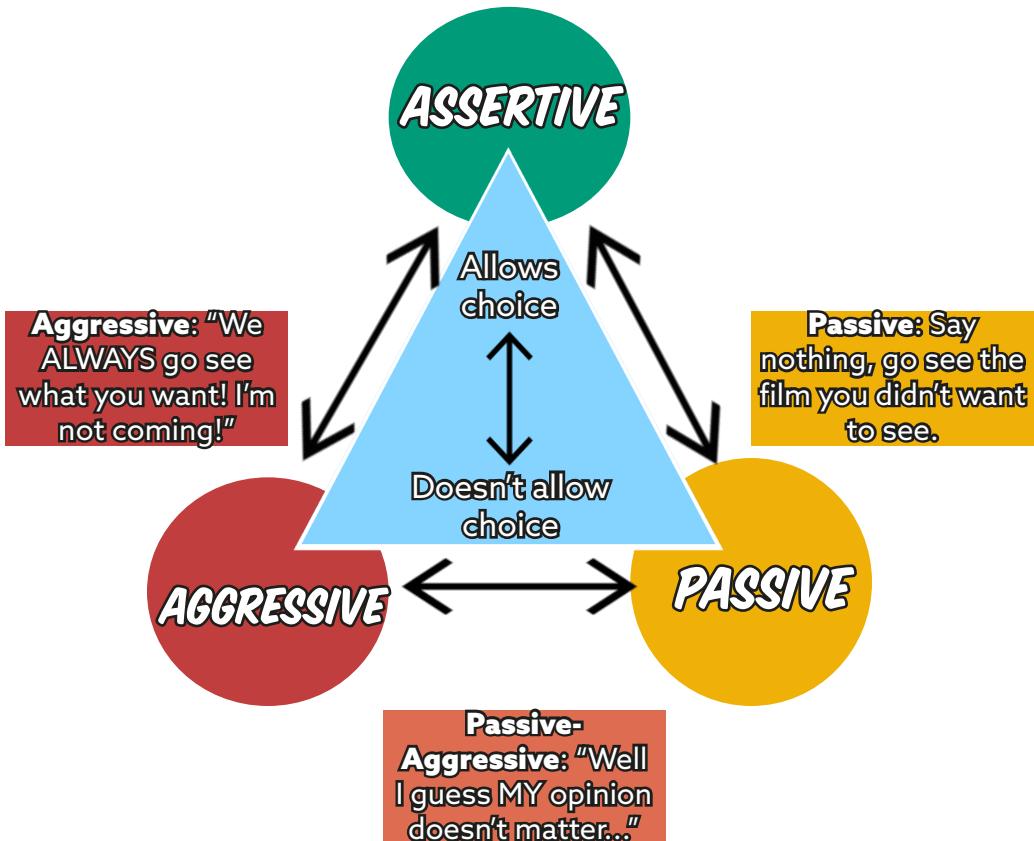


I. TYPES OF COMMUNICATION

There are 3 main types of communication - assertive, aggressive and passive.

Say you're going to the cinema with mates. You get there and they have changed the plan and you're now going to watch a horror film, which you really don't like! Your reaction would be different depending on the type of communication you use...

Assertive: "I don't like horror films. Can we please go see something else?"



Have a think about which types of communication you tend to use in different situations - for example, with parents, with authority figures, with friends, with partners etc...

ASSERTIVENESS AND COMPASSION

Assertiveness not only helps us to communicate what we mean better, but it also helps us to talk more openly about what we want from other people and the world around us.

However, we can feel a little awkward asking for what we want for a number of reasons. Whether it's because we feel like we're 'putting other people out of their way' in our requests, or simply because we think we might not deserve it.

However, if someone else asked us for the same stuff, we may be more willing to give others what they want if they asked and not feel like they're putting us out of our way at all. This type of warmth for others can be called compassion. We can often be much more compassionate to other people rather than ourselves, and this can get in the way of us being assertive in getting our needs met.

Use the following questions to think about how we can be more compassionate to ourselves:

1. Think of something you would like from a situation, relationship or event in your life that you haven't been able to ask for yet. What's getting in the way?

2. Imagine your best friend is in the same position, and comes to you to ask for help. What would you tell them about what's in the way?

3. Tell yourself the same things you would tell your best friend. How does this change how you think and feel about asking for what you want?

FEEDBACK LOOPS

We can use feedback loops to communicate assertively. By putting our feelings first, we are taking responsibility and reducing the risk of someone responding defensively to what we are saying. We can use these loops for both positive and negative feedback!

STRUCTURE: I FEEL... (FEELING)... WHEN YOU... (ACTION)

For example:

- I feel great when you hug me.
- I feel sad when you tell me about your difficult past.
- I feel angry when you shout at me.
- I feel really happy when you text me out of the blue just to say "hey".
- I feel upset when i'm telling you about my day and you keep looking at your phone.
- I feel relaxed and safe when you listen to me.
- I feel frustrated when you come into my room without knocking.
- I feel much better when you knock before coming into my room.

Have a go!

Think of two positive and one negative feedback loop you might want to use with people you know (look at the examples above for inspiration!)

1.

2.

3.

COMMUNICATING DESIRE

We can also assertively communicate desire by using phrases such as:

- 1) I WANT TO...
- 2) I WANT YOU TO...
- 3) I DON'T WANT TO...
- 4) I WANT YOU TO STOP...
- 5) NO.

For example:

- I want to keep hugging each other when we meet.
- I want you to keep telling me what happened in your past.
- I want you to shout at me less often.
- I want you to keep texting me out of the blue.
- I want you to stop looking at your phone when I'm telling you about my day.
- I want you to knock before coming into my room.
- I don't want to go to that movie.
- I don't want to stay with you right now.

Have a go!

We can combine feedback loops and communicating desire to assertively give feedback.

E.g. *I feel frustrated when you keep coming into my room without knocking. I want you to please knock before coming in.*

Have a go at adding a desire to each of your feedback loops:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

ACTIVE LISTENING AND PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Often when we feel like we have to assert ourselves, it's to try and manage a conflict or dispute. Letting the other person/people know that you hear their side of things is a great tool to do this. There are 2 main things you can do to show active listening whilst being assertive:

1) PARAPHRASING:

Say what you hear about the facts in your own words: E.G.

Person A: *I went to school yesterday, and Brian was a real idiot. He kept saying stupid things and wouldn't leave me alone.*

Person B: *Sounds like he was really annoying.*

2) EMPATHISING:

Say what you hear about their feelings. E.G.

Person A: *Totally! I got so angry at him I screamed!*

Person B: *Wow, so you were really frustrated then?*

Person A: *I was! He's such an idiot.*

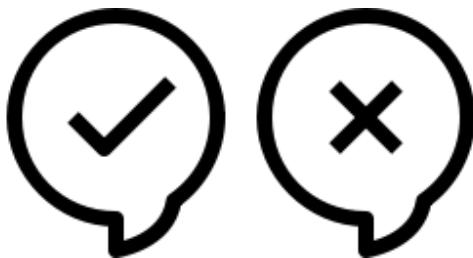
Have a go!

We can combine all we've learned so far to communicate in a way that's effective, honest and without blame - yet also assertive and powerful.

E.g. I understand that you feel upset, but I feel nervous when you shout at me. I want you to shout at me less often.

Have a go at putting active listening, feedback loops and desires all in one:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



This booklet was made by OTR Bristol,
a mental health social movement by and
for young people aged 11-25 in Bristol
and South Glos.

For more information on what we do,
come and see us at one of our Hubs:
otrbristol.org.uk/what-we-do/hubs.

You can also call us for free on
0808 808 9120 (Mon-Fri, 2-5pm).

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