



Assertiveness: How to Ask for What You Need in the Lab and in Life

Amanda Dumsch
Career Counselor, OITE

Objectives

- Understand that you have the right to be assertive
- Learn some benefits and components of assertiveness
- Realize the importance of support



What does assertiveness mean to you?

What is being assertive?

- An honest and appropriate expression of your wants, opinions, feelings and needs.
- May include standing up for your rights
- Communicating what you want clearly, while respecting your own rights and feelings, and the rights and feelings of others.

Being Assertive Can Help You

- Ask for help if you need it.
- Express anger, disappointment, annoyance appropriately.
- Ask questions when you're confused.
- Present your opinions when you think or feel differently than others.

Assertive Rights

You have the right

- to be treated with respect and dignity.
- to have and express your own feelings and opinions.
- to be listened to and taken seriously.
- to say : " I don't understand."

Positive Outcome

- Think about a time when you stood up for yourself and there was a positive outcome.
- Or think about a time when you observed someone else standing up for himself/herself; a friend, a colleague etc.
- What happened?

Being Assertive Can Help You...

- Speak up in lab meetings when you want to.
- Say "no" when you don't want to do something.
- Make your own choices.

How is being assertive different from being aggressive?

Aggressive Behavior

often involves standing up for yourself in ways that violate the rights of others.

Aggressive behavior can be hostile, blaming, or demanding.

What causes people to avoid being assertive?

- Not knowing what they want/need
- Fear of displeasing others and of not being liked.
- Not believing that they have the right to be assertive.
- Lacking the skills to effectively express what they want to express

Cultural variations

- Your family and cultural background may affect your comfort with some assertive behaviors.
- You may stay true to your values and still express yourself
- Consider some cultural variations that you have experienced or expect?

FUTURE POSITIVE EXPERIENCE

- What do you want?
- What do you need?
- What do you want to ask for?
- What do you want to express?



Thinking assertively

- Trust yourself and experiment a little
- Try it out step by step
- Your attitudes can change because of your actions
- You will feel better about yourself through speaking up and expressing yourself

Assertiveness Skills

- I - Statements
- Fogging

Skills

1. I-Statements

Especially useful for expressing negative feelings. Use a 3-part statement:

- 1) (describe the behavior or situation; what you want or want to express) When this happens . . .
- 2) (describe how the behavior concretely affects you). The effects are . .
- 3) (describe what you want/need).
I would prefer, I would like . . .

I-Statements cont.

- The real focus in I-statements is on the "I want," and "I feel" part of the statement vs "You should.."
- When expressing disappointment, anger, distress, I-statements can help us to not blame the other person, or get caught up in the emotion.

I-Statements example 1

- When you don't clean up your lab space like you said you would,
- it makes things more disorganized for everyone.
- Next time, I'd like you to follow through when you agree to clean up each afternoon.

I- Statements

example 2

- I understand that you don't think I need a vacation,
- However, I have been working very hard on...
- And I want to take off (specific dates) to spend time with my family.

2. Fogging

- When someone behaves aggressively or critically they may expect disagreement, defensiveness, or resistance.
- Fogging is an unexpected response.
- You can sidestep their issue, still keeping your point of view and integrity by agreeing with some part of what they say.

Fogging example 1

- The word “yes” takes people by surprise.
- e.g. Someone says, “Well that was a poor presentation you gave at lab meeting”
- You might say “**Yes**, *I can see that I have some areas that could be improved*”
- You are not agreeing that the entire presentation was poor, only that you understand that they believe that it was.

Fogging

example 2

PI/Supervisor

“You haven’t been around the lab much, you need to spend more time here”

Post-doc or graduate student (Fogging)

“Yes, I can see how it might seem that I haven’t been in the lab much. However, I have been doing a lot of work on the weekend and at night.”

HOW YOU SAY IT MATTERS

Use your best communication skills

- Maintain direct eye contact;
- Keep your posture open and relaxed;
- Be sure your facial expression agrees with the message;
- Keep a level, well-modulated tone of voice.

Timing

- Never too late to be assertive
- Appropriate time and place
- Not in front of others, if sensitive or critical
- Would it be better to wait until tomorrow?
- At the moment can be best
- Don't wait too long
- Don't make it a big deal

Choose when to be assertive

- Do you know what outcome you want/need?
- Will it make a difference?
- How much does it matter to you?
- What is the probability of getting what you want?
- What other options do you have?
- Have you practiced?

Start Gradually

- In the beginning, don't try changing your behavior in loaded or difficult situations.
- Start small to enhance success.
- Practice first in the least risky situations.

Start Gradually cont.

- Returning products back to a store
- Giving a positive comment to someone "I liked your lab presentation"
- Asking your roommate to empty the dishwasher, clean up the kitchen

See how it feels to be assertive, to express yourself

Thoughts to Consider

- No one is a mind reader
- “I have no way of knowing unless you tell me”
- Sometimes you won't get what you want-how will you cope?

Some situations you may decide:

- Are insurmountable
- Are unhealthy for you
- You just can't change
- You may want to seek help
- You may want to seriously consider another path

Life is not perfect. You can move on toward your goals in another way

NIH Resources

Employee Assistance Program

<http://dohs.ors.od.nih.gov/eap/>

301-496-3164

NIH Office of the Ombudsman

<http://ombudsman.nih.gov/>

301-594-7231

* 5 Skills adapted from [When I Say No I Feel Guilty](#) , Manuel J Smith, 1975

Make an appointment

- If you want to practice or talk more about assertiveness, schedule an appointment

- Amanda: amanda.dumsch@nih.gov

Questions?