



Assert Yourself

2 May 2016

I want to talk about assertiveness in this newsletter as I find it is still a concept and practice that is misunderstood. And being assertive is an important part of being mentally well and living a good life. It is also an important part of managing stress. People who are not assertive are more stressed.

If you read up about assertiveness or attend a workshop or training course on being assertive often you will find assertiveness compared to passiveness or aggressiveness. Now the comparisons are useful in helping to understand assertiveness. I use them as well. But assertiveness does not lie half way on a continuum between passive behaviour and aggressive behaviour. It is not the case that when you are halfway between passive and aggressive behaviour, you are assertive. Assertive is something quite different. In fact all three are quite different. I have also found that often people tell me they are assertive, or will describe themselves as displaying assertive behaviour, when in fact they are being aggressive.

Assertiveness essentially means I value myself and I value others as human beings. I stand up for myself while at the same time respecting the self-esteem of others. I recognise I have a right to express my views and opinions and other people also have a right to express their opinions and views even if they are very different from mine. I am not better than other people and they are not better than me. It is a "we both matter" mindset. I respect myself and I also respect you.

Because I value myself as a human being I will:

- Express my thoughts and opinions openly and honestly, and in a dignified and respectful way.
- Listen to the points of view of others without feeling attacked or getting defensive.
- Express my feelings openly and honestly and point out when I feel upset or hurt by the actions of others in such a way that I don't demean them.
- Treat myself with respect in all situations.
- Be comfortable to ask questions when I don't understand something without feeling stupid or in any way less than others.
- Ask for what I need.
- Refuse to accept mistreatment from others and communicate this to them in a way that is not aggressive or violent. I will not be violent and aggressive in return because to behave like that is to not respect myself. (Violent and aggressive is not who people are. They are reactions to wounding people have sustained. They are defences- they are not the core or essence of who a person is.)
- Be able to say no when I don't want to do something.
- Not say sorry all the time - unless there is something I have done to be sorry for.
- Take responsibility for my life and expect other adults to take responsibility for their lives
- Not condemn myself for mistakes and instead choose to learn from them.



Because I value others as human beings it means I will:

- Speak up about what I want and need and not expect others to read my mind.
- Accept that others can have opinions and views different from mine. I will not demand that others agree with me.
- Not insist on getting my own way no matter who might be in the way and gets trampled on.
- Not pretend to be someone other than myself in order to be liked or accepted.
- Not demean, belittle or attack others.
- Not challenge others for the sake of provoking them or stirring things up. I will challenge when there is a legitimate reason to challenge and I will do so in a way that is respectful of myself and others
- I will not tell others how they are thinking and feeling. I will allow and encourage them to share their thoughts and feelings.
- Not expect others to do something I would not do.
- Be kind, but not self-sacrificing
- Not placate, be unkind or be manipulative to get my own way.
- Understand that I will not always get what I want and be okay with this.

Assertiveness is not possible without good self-esteem. People who are assertive realise this and work on keeping their self-esteem high. They also realise that self-esteem is something you can work on, and they are willing to put in the work.