

Carers' Self Advocacy Toolkit

# How to be more assertive



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Most of us know that assertiveness will get you further in life than being passive or aggressive. But few of us are actually taught *how* to be assertive and it's not always an easy option. Here are some helpful tips.

**Choose the right time** A professional has called at your house to drop off some forms. She seems in a hurry. You ask about respite as you feel you need a break. The social worker says she'll get back to you, but you don't hear anything. So ask for a specific time to talk about respite.

**Choose the right place.** Discuss important issues in a private, neutral location.

**Be direct.** For example, "Lisa, I would like to discuss the issue of respite please". Whether or not Lisa likes your request, she understands what you want.

**Say "I", not "we."** Instead of saying, "We need a break by next year," say, "I would like you to arrange respite before December".

**Be specific.** Instead of "hurry up with organising that respite for me," say, "I would like the respite break to be organised by the 1<sup>st</sup> October."

**Use vocal tone to emphasize your words.** "Lisa, I need that respite in place by the beginning of October," is an assertive statement. But if you mumble this statement while staring at the floor, you undermine your message. Saying it confidently will help get your message across.

**Confirm your request.** Ask to see the notes taken at meetings or ask someone to take notes for you. At the end of each meeting, ask of the key actions that were agreed. This minimises miscommunication.

**Stand up for yourself.** Don't allow others to take advantage of you; insist on being treated fairly. Here are a few examples: "I was here first", "I'd like more coffee please", "I can't make that time because I have another appointment", "Please speak up".

**Learn to be friendly** with people you would like to know better. Do not avoid people because you don't know what to say. Smile at people. Convey that you are happy to see them.

**Express your opinions honestly.** When you disagree with someone, do not pretend to agree. When you are asked to do something unreasonable, ask for an explanation.

**Share your experiences and opinions.** When you have done something worthwhile, let others know about it.

**Learn to accept kind words.** When someone compliments you, say "thank you".

**Maintain eye contact** when you are in a conversation.

**Don't get personal.** When expressing annoyance or criticism, comment on the person's *behaviour* rather than attacking the person. For example: "Please don't talk to me that way," rather than, "What kind of fool are you?".

**Use "I" statements** when commenting on another's behaviour. For example: "When you cancel

meetings at the last minute, it's very inconvenient and I feel really annoyed."

**State what you want.** If appropriate, ask for another behaviour. ("I think we'd better sit down and try to work out how we can make plans together and cut down on this kind of problem.")

**Look for good examples.** Pay attention to assertive people and model your behaviour after theirs.

**Start slowly.** Express your assertiveness in low-anxiety situations at first; don't leap into a highly emotional situation until you have more confidence. Most people don't learn new skills overnight and it can be very difficult if you are not used to being assertive.

**Reward yourself** each time you push yourself to formulate an assertive response. Do this regardless of the response from the other person.

**Don't put yourself down** when you behave passively or aggressively. Instead, identify where you went off course and learn how to improve.

## Four Assertiveness Tools

### 1. Follow this 4 step rule

<b>Say what's happened/what you want</b>	Set the scene, explain the background and use 'I' statements. Keep to facts and don't make judgments
<b>Say how you think and feel</b>	Describe your feelings, though don't accuse Use 'I' language and not 'you' language
<b>Say what you would like to happen</b>	Use 'I' language
<b>Negotiate</b>	(See Toolkit Section on Negotiation)

**2. Broken Record Technique** – repeat the words exactly like a broken record – the power is in the same words being used in the same tone of voice. Think of Jeremy Paxman's interviewing style...



**3. De fogging** – asking questions to get the other person to be more specific e.g.  
"I don't like your attitude."

**"What exactly is it that you don't like about my attitude?"**

"It's just your attitude, it's so annoying."

**"Can you tell me what it is about my attitude that annoys you?"**

"It's the way you speak to me."

**"Maybe there is a problem with how I speak to you. Can you give me an example?"**

### 4. Saying NO positively

- Acknowledge the request
- Decline
- Explain why you can't accept the request
- Make an offer that you can accept

## References

Circles Training Network, Communicating and influencing at work, four assertiveness tools presentation, Rugby, Circles Training, 2012