What Is Assertiveness? (Elementary)

Have you ever wanted to share your thoughts or feelings but just couldn't find the words? Or maybe you said something hurtful to a friend and didn't mean it. When you want to respectfully express what you think or need, assertiveness will help.

Assertiveness is respectfully asking for what you want and explaining how you feel while respecting what others want and feel. When you are assertive, you stop and think about another person's feelings and ideas even if they are different from yours. Assertiveness will help you communicate with siblings, friends, teachers, and family members even when it's hard to speak up or when you disagree. Being assertive will also help you stand up for yourself when someone isn't being respectful to you.

When I need to be assertive, I use strategies like ***identify communication types***, ***find and voice my feelings***, and ***show respect without words***. These strategies help me communicate what I think and feel, and they help me get along with others. Assertiveness strategies will help you too!

Identify Communication Types **(Elementary)**

When we communicate, we share information and ideas with others. There are three different communication types. The first is passive. When we are passive, we are afraid to say what we want, think, and need. We don't voice our feelings. Communicating passively can be done with words or actions. When our words are passive, we say things like "I don't care." When our bodies are passive, we frown, shrug our shoulders, or stay in a corner by ourselves.

The next communication type is aggressive. When our words are aggressive, we shout or say mean things to others. When our bodies are aggressive, we cross our arms, stomp our feet, or put our face too close to someone else's.

The third communication type is assertive. When we are assertive, we speak clearly and pronounce our words. We communicate assertively with our body by standing up straight and making eye contact with the other person. Communicating assertively shows others that we respect them and that we respect ourselves.

You can practice ***identifying the communication types*** by watching how people communicate and identifying if they are being passive, assertive, or aggressive. Let's say you and your friend disagree over who the greatest basketball player of all time is.

- How would your friend communicate passively? What would they say and do?
- How would your friend communicate aggressively? What would they say and do?
- How could your friend communicate assertively about who they think the best basketball player is?

When you practice ***identifying communication types*** in yourself and others, you learn to use assertive communication to respectfully express what you want, need, or feel.

Find My Feelings & Voice My Feelings **(Elementary)**

Has there ever been a time when you had a lot of emotions and that made you feel all mixed up inside? Maybe you couldn't describe what you were feeling, so you used words like "happy," "mad," or "sad."

When you have big feelings, it's important to stop and think about what you are feeling and why you are feeling that way. When you stop and think about your feelings, you are practicing the strategy ***find my feelings***.

We can use a feelings chart to think about what we are feeling and why. A feelings chart will help you identify more complex feelings, like shy, stressed, or hurt. We can also use clues from our body—like butterflies in our stomach, shaky hands, or a racing heart—to understand how we feel. It's normal to have strong feelings, and we can have more than one feeling at once!

I used the strategy ***find my feelings*** when I had to go to a new school. I thought I felt sad, but my stomach had butterflies, and I knew that wasn't something that usually happens when I feel sad. When I stopped to think about my feelings, I realized that a better description was nervous and also a little excited. After I was able to ***find my feelings***, I needed to explain how I was feeling.

You can explain your feelings by using the strategy ***voice my feelings***. When you ***voice your feelings***, you communicate how you feel and what is making you feel that way. You can use the sentence "I feel [blank] when [blank]." I used the strategy ***voice my feelings*** to communicate my feelings about going to a new school. I explained, "I feel nervous and excited when I have to change schools and make new friends."

When you have big feelings and start to feel mixed up inside, remember to stop and think about how you are feeling and what is making you feel that way. Use clues from your body to help you identify complex feelings. After you have ***found your feelings***, use the strategy ***voice my feelings*** to express your feelings respectfully.

Show Empathy **(Elementary)**

Have you ever had a disagreement with your friend, and you couldn't understand why they were mad at you? Do you have a hard time understanding how others feel, especially if they feel different than you? When it's hard to understand another person's ideas or feelings, use the strategy ***show empathy*** to help you. ***Showing empathy*** means that you stop and think about how someone else may feel. You might even think about a time when you were in a similar situation and how you felt. We are showing the other person that we respect them when we try to understand how they feel.

You can use clues from their facial expressions and body language. You can also ask the other person questions about how they are feeling. And then you can say something to communicate that you have thought about their ideas or feelings, like "It seems like you might be feeling … "

I used the strategy ***show empathy*** to help me understand why my friend Ana didn't want to be in the school play. Earlier in the year, we had talked about how fun it would be to dress up in costumes and perform in front of our friends, but when the teacher said we would have to try out for the play by reading a few lines, Ana didn't want to do it anymore. Her face looked disappointed, and her shoulders were sagging. I asked her, "Why have you changed your mind about being in the play?" After a few minutes, she explained to me that she was struggling with reading. She was afraid she wouldn't be able to read the lines during tryouts.

I thought about how Ana was feeling. To ***show empathy***, I said, "It sounds like you still want to try out for the play but you don't want to read the lines without practicing first." We were able to get a copy of the lines before tryouts so she could practice reading them ahead of time.

The next time you don't understand how someone is feeling, use clues from their facial expressions and body language. Ask questions to help understand their thoughts or feelings and ***show empathy*** by communicating that you understand them.

***Listen and Summarize & Show Respect Without Words* (Elementary)**

Have you ever told someone an important story, and you felt like they weren't listening to you? Maybe they weren't looking at you or kept waving to their friends while you were telling the story, and you felt hurt. Showing respect for another person starts by ***showing respect without words***. You can ***show respect without words*** by making eye contact with the other person, keeping your hands and feet still, and focusing on what they say. It is important to ***show respect without words*** so that the other person knows you are thinking about what they are saying.

You can show respect for another person by listening closely to what they are saying and summarizing what they have said. When you summarize what another person has said, you use your own words to explain the most important parts of what they said. When you summarize, you shouldn't tell the other person what to do or what you think. You should just summarize what they have told you by recalling the important parts using your own words.

I used the strategies ***show respect without words*** and ***listen and summarize*** when my brother wanted to tell me about a disagreement he had with his friend Anthony. I used the strategy ***show respect without words*** by keeping my hands and feet quiet. I also looked at my brother while he was telling the story. He and Anthony agreed to play soccer after school, but my brother forgot that his teacher had already asked him to stay after school to work on math. He didn't tell Anthony he couldn't play, and now Anthony was mad because my brother didn't show up to play soccer.

I used the strategy ***listen and summarize*** by focusing on what my brother was saying and summarizing the important parts of his story. I didn't tell him what to do or what I thought about the situation. I summarized by saying, "You forgot to tell Anthony you were going to work on math after school, and now he feels upset because you didn't meet him at the soccer field. Is that right?"

You might use the strategies ***show respect without words*** and ***listen and summarize*** in school when your teacher is explaining something or at home when a family member wants to tell you about their day. When you ***listen and summarize*** and ***show respect without words***, you will understand better what others are communicating to you.

Speak My Mind and Be Kind **(Elementary)**

Have you ever needed help with something but were afraid to ask? Or maybe you wanted something, but you weren't respectful and hurt the other person's feelings.

You can use the strategy ***speak my mind and be kind*** to help you communicate your wants and needs respectfully. Speaking your mind means sharing your thoughts and opinions while being kind to the other person. It takes courage to speak up, especially if you think others won't agree with what you have to say or if you don't know if you are correct. With practice, we can learn to share our thoughts while respecting others.

When I need to share my ideas or thoughts, I use an assertive statement. An assertive statement has three parts. First, ***show empathy*** and let the other person know you have thought about how they feel in the situation. Second, use the strategy ***voice my feelings*** to describe your feelings and the reason you are feeling that way. Then ***speak your mind and be kind*** by clearly explaining what you want to happen.

I used an assertive statement when I needed to tell my friend how I felt about being left out of the soccer game. It was my friend's turn to be captain of the soccer team during recess. He had already grabbed the soccer ball and decided who was on his team. I asked if I could be on his team, and he said, "We already have enough players. You can't play soccer today." I wanted to yell at him for leaving me out, but I knew it would just make things worse. I decided to use an assertive statement to ***speak my mind and be kind***. I started by ***showing empathy*** for my friend and thinking about why he may have left me off the team. I decided that he was probably really excited to play and wanted to start the game quickly.

Next, I needed to ***voice my feelings***. I thought about how watching the game and not playing made me feel sad and left out. I wondered if people thought I was bad at soccer or didn't like me, and I felt insecure. Then, I knew I needed to have courage and ***speak my mind and be kind*** by talking to my friend. I said, "I bet you were excited and in a hurry to start the soccer game. I felt left out and sad when I couldn't play in the game. Next time, I will try to get outside earlier, but can you also save me a place on your team?"

I also used an assertive statement with my sister. I knew she used my bike because hers had a flat tire, but I needed it. I first ***showed empathy*** and thought about why she might have taken my bike. Then I ***voiced my feelings*** about what had happened. Finally, I shared what I wanted to happen. I put the three parts together and said to her, "I understand that your bike had a flat tire and you wanted to go somewhere, but I had planned to ride bikes with my friends and was really looking forward to it. Please ask me next time you want to borrow my bike." My sister said she was sorry, and an argument was avoided.

The next time you need to ask for something or share your thoughts and ideas, use the strategy ***speak my mind and be kind*** as part of an assertive statement. By doing so, you communicate respectfully and are more likely to get along with others and get what you are asking for!

Respect My Boundaries **(Elementary)**

Has anybody ever asked you to do something you didn't want to do, but you didn't know how to tell them no? Maybe a friend asked you to stop talking to a different friend, and it made you feel confused and sad. Maybe a friend asked to copy the answers on your math quiz, and it made you feel nervous and guilty. We can prepare for speaking up in situations like these by using the strategy ***respect my boundaries***.

When we use the strategy ***respect my boundaries***, we make rules, or boundaries, about what we will or will not do in challenging situations. Some example boundaries are:

- I won't let people cheat off me,
- I won't watch someone being bullied and not say anything (even if it is online), and
- I won't take things that aren't mine without asking.

We need boundaries so that we can stay happy and healthy. You know a boundary has been crossed when you feel regret or shame as it is happening.

Use the strategy ***respect my boundaries*** by doing the following steps:

1. Think about past situations where you felt uncomfortable or uneasy with something that you were asked to do.
2. Identify your boundary by using the sentence "I won't [blank] when [blank]."
3. Think about what you'll say if your boundary is crossed, and develop an assertive statement.

Thinking about your boundaries and your responses in advance will help you be ready for challenging situations. When you use the strategy ***respect my boundaries***, you know and can explain the things you won't do.

For example, one of my boundaries is "I won't stay quiet if someone calls other people bad names." When I am in a situation where someone is saying mean things, I use an assertive statement like "I know you are angry, but it makes me feel bad when you call other people mean names. Let's be nice when we talk about other people."

Knowing your boundaries and respecting them will help you know what to do when people cross them.

Do My Part **(Elementary)**

Does your teacher or coach ever ask you to work with a partner or in a group? You may have been part of a group where one person did all the talking or one where someone didn't do their share of the work. Working with others is something you will need to do throughout school and life. When you work well with others, you share your ideas, listen to their ideas, and develop a plan for completing the task. You can use the strategy ***do my part*** when you have thoughts, ideas, or big feelings you need to express while working with others.

I used the strategy ***do my part*** in my art class. My teacher put us in groups and asked us to design a mural for our school's open house. We started brainstorming about the mural by asking each person from the group to share one idea, but before anyone could share an idea, Caleb took over and began telling us what our group was going to paint. I knew that ***doing my part*** meant that I needed to help others by giving them the opportunity to share their ideas and that I needed to respectfully help Caleb understand that he wasn't doing his part when he took over the group. I used an assertive statement and the strategy ***do my part*** to help the group work well together. I said to Caleb, "I know you are very excited about getting started on the mural, but I think we should hear everyone's ideas before we decide on what we should do. Let's each share an idea and then vote on the one we like best."

Think about the strategy ***do your part*** anytime you are working with others. Remember that when you ***do your part***, you communicate your ideas and thoughts respectfully and encourage others to do the same. You also listen to others' thoughts and ideas, and your group works together to decide how to complete the task.

Predict Outcomes **(Elementary)**

The way we communicate with other people is a choice that affects the outcome of a situation. We can choose to communicate passively, aggressively, or assertively in any situation. When you stop to think about how you want to respond in a situation and what might happen, you are ***predicting the outcome***. "Predict" means "to think ahead."

Let's say you really need help with your math problems. You can choose to react passively and avoid asking for help. The outcome will likely be that you have to redo all of the problems and get further behind in math. You can choose to react aggressively by rolling your eyes and sighing loudly when you can't get the correct answer. The outcome will probably be that your teacher gets upset with you for disturbing the class. You can also choose to communicate assertively by raising your hand and politely asking your teacher to help you after she finishes helping your friend.

I used the strategy ***predict outcomes*** when I lost the permission slip my parents needed to sign so I could go on the class field trip. I really wanted to go on the field trip, so I needed to choose a way to communicate that would ensure I would get to go. I thought about communicating passively and not telling anyone I had lost it. When my teacher called out the names of the students who turned in their permission slips, my name wouldn't be called, and I probably wouldn't get to go on the field trip. I could have chosen to communicate aggressively and yelled at my mom for cleaning out my backpack and possibly throwing away the permission slip. The result would probably be that I would hurt my mother's feelings and get in trouble for raising my voice. I chose to communicate assertively by saying to my teacher, "I know you are busy getting us ready for the field trip, but I have lost my permission slip. Could you please make a copy for me?"

When you ***predict outcomes***, you stop and think about what could happen if you used passive, aggressive, or assertive communication, and you decide which type is best for the situation. You can use the strategy ***predict outcomes*** to choose the type of communication you should use to get the outcome you prefer.