

What Is Assertiveness? (Secondary)

Have you ever wanted to share your thoughts or feelings but were afraid of what others might think of you? 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 expressing your wants, needs, and thoughts, even when it's difficult, while respecting what others want, need, and think, even when it's difficult. 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 (Secondary)

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, need, and think. We don't voice our feelings. Communicating passively can be verbal or nonverbal, through body language. When we are verbally passive, we say things like "Whatever you think is best." When we use body language to communicate passively, we avoid eye contact, shrug our shoulders, or isolate ourselves.

The next communication type is assertive. When we are verbally assertive, we speak clearly and pronounce our words. When we use body language to communicate assertively, we stand up straight and make eye contact with the other person. Communicating assertively shows others that we respect them and ourselves.

The third communication type is aggressive. When we are verbally aggressive, we yell or say cruel things to others. When we use body language to communicate aggressively, we glare, clench our fists, or invade others' space.

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 what you plan to do together after school.

- How would your friend communicate passively? What would they say and do?
- How would your friend communicate assertively? What would they say and do?
- How would your friend communicate aggressively? What would they say and do?

When you practice ***identifying communication types*** in yourself and others, it helps you understand how the type of communication you use impacts the outcome of a situation.

Find My Feelings & Voice My Feelings (Secondary)

Have you ever felt as though several emotions were all jumbled up inside you? Maybe you couldn't quite describe what you were feeling, so you settled on basic words like "happy," "mad," or "sad."

When you have strong emotions, 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 begin thinking about what our feelings are and why. A feelings chart will help you identify more complex feelings, like hesitant, overwhelmed, or inquisitive. We can also use clues from our body—like scrunched-up shoulders, trembling hands, or the urge to run out of the room—to understand how we feel. It's normal to have strong emotions, even to have more than one at the same time!

I used the strategy ***find my feelings*** when I started high school. I thought I felt excited about being a freshman, but I was nauseous, which I knew wasn't something that usually happens when I feel excited. When I stopped to think about my feelings, I realized that a better description was nervous. I was excited about going to high school but nervous about finding my way around the building and attending classes with older students. After I was able to ***find my feelings***, I needed to explain my feelings.

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 high school. I explained, "I feel nervous and excited when I think about moving up to high school and adjusting to new classes and teachers."

When you have strong emotions and start to feel many different things at once, 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 (Secondary)

Have you ever had a disagreement with your friend, and you couldn't understand why they were so upset? 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 and why they might feel that way. You think about a time when you had similar feelings, and you show that person respect by trying to understand and communicating that understanding.

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 Oscar didn't want to enroll in drafting class with me. Earlier in the year, we had talked about how fun it would be to create blueprints and 3D models, but when it was time to sign up for the class, Oscar didn't want to do it anymore. His face looked disappointed, and he wouldn't look at me. I asked him, "Why did you change your mind about enrolling in drafting?" After a few minutes, he explained that he had talked to the counselor. She had informed him that drafting would require knowledge of geometry, and he hadn't taken that class yet.

I thought about how Oscar was feeling. To **show empathy**, I said, "It sounds like you really want to learn drafting but will need to take geometry first." We agreed that he should enroll in geometry and I would enroll in drafting, and we would tell each other about what we were learning in our classes. We could even design buildings on our own during our free 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 (Secondary)

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 texting their friends while you were telling the story, and you felt ignored. 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 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 have said without telling them what to do or what you think. You 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 sister wanted to tell me about a disagreement she had with her friend Maria. I used the strategy ***show respect without words*** by listening carefully to what she said and looking at her while she was telling the story. She and Maria had agreed to go to the football game together, but her friend Josie invited her to a concert. The concert sounded like more fun. When my sister explained to Maria that she would rather go to the concert than the football game, Maria became upset and refused to talk to her the rest of the day.

I used the strategy ***listen and summarize*** by focusing on what my sister was saying and summarizing the important parts of her story. I didn't tell her what to do or what I thought about the situation. I summarized by saying, "You told Maria you would rather go to the concert. She was upset about this and didn't talk to you the rest of the day. Is that right?"

You might use the strategies ***show respect without words*** and ***listen and summarize*** in school when your teacher is explaining something new or at home when a family member is describing a tough day they had. When you ***listen and summarize*** and ***show respect without words***, it helps you understand the other person.

Speak My Mind and Be Kind (Secondary)

Have you ever needed help but were too worried about what someone would think of you for asking? Or maybe you wanted something so badly that you forgot to think about another 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.

When you need to share your thoughts or ideas, use a three-part assertive statement. First, ***show empathy*** by letting the other person know you are considering their feelings and reasoning. Next, use the strategy ***voice my feelings*** to describe your feelings and the reason you feel 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 after not being invited to hang out with her on Saturday night. When I asked her what she was doing on Saturday, she said she had invited some people over to watch movies. Her mom had told her she could only invite three people. Since my friend had already invited three people, I couldn't come over.

I wanted to yell at her 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 she didn't invite me. She had class with the other girls she invited, and she knew that I didn't really like watching movies.

Next, I needed to ***voice my feelings***. I thought about how having no plans on Saturday made me feel rejected and lonely. I wondered if my friend would talk about me to the other girls, and I felt insecure. Lastly, I thought about what I wanted to happen in the future so that I could ***speak my mind and be kind***. I used a three-part assertive statement and said, "I know you were excited to watch movies on Saturday and that your mom limited the number of friends you could invite. I felt rejected and lonely when you didn't invite me. Next time, I will try to understand if you want to do something I don't like, but could you also check with me to see if I might want to hang out anyway?" By using the assertive statement, I was able to communicate respectfully about the issue.

I also used an assertive statement with my sister. I knew she used my AirPods because hers weren't charged up, but I needed them. I first ***showed empathy*** and thought about why she might have borrowed them without asking. Next, I ***voiced my feelings*** about what had happened. Finally, I ***spoke my mind and was kind*** by sharing what I wanted to happen. I put the three parts together and said to her, "I understand that your AirPods weren't charged and you wanted to listen to music, but I listen to music to help me concentrate, and I needed them when I was getting ready for my volleyball game. Please ask me next time you want to borrow my AirPods." My sister said she was sorry, and we avoided an argument.

The next time you need to ask for something or share your thoughts and ideas, use the strategy ***speak my mind and be kind*** to help you. When you use this strategy, you are able to share your thoughts and ideas respectfully while acknowledging someone else's thoughts and ideas.

Respect My Boundaries (Secondary)

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 avoid one of your other friends, and it made you feel awkward and disrespectful. Maybe a bully told you to email him screenshots of your math homework, and it made you feel powerless and anxious. 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 set guidelines, or boundaries, about what we will or will not do in challenging situations. Some example boundaries are:

- I won't cheat or let people cheat off me,
- I won't keep silent when I see someone being bullied in person or 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 taking 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 use an assertive statement to protect your boundary.

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 that I won't let someone cheat off of me. To be ready for this situation, I prepared this three-part assertive statement: "I know you forgot to do your homework, but I don't feel comfortable letting you cheat off me. I will help you if you don't understand the work, but I won't let you copy my work."

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

Do My Part (Secondary)

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 made all of the decisions or where someone else didn't do their share. Working with others is something you will need to do in school and throughout your life. Using the strategy ***do my part*** helps you to remember to communicate ideas respectfully, encourage others to do the same, listen to others' ideas, and work together to complete the task.

I used the strategy ***do my part*** in history class. My teacher put us in groups and asked us to design a World War II propaganda poster. We started brainstorming about the poster by asking each person from the group to share one idea, but before anyone could share an idea, Samuel took over and began telling everyone else how our group was going to design the poster. I knew that ***doing my part*** meant I needed to help others by giving them the opportunity to share their ideas. I also needed to respectfully help Samuel 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 told Samuel, "I know you are very excited about getting started on the poster, but we feel frustrated when we can't share our own ideas. 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 my part*** anytime you are working with others. Remember that when you ***do you part***, you communicate your thoughts and ideas 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 (Secondary)

The way we communicate with others is a choice, and the communication type we use affects the outcome of a situation. We can choose to communicate passively, assertively, or aggressively in any situation. When you stop to think about how the type of communication you choose will affect the outcome, you are ***predicting outcomes***.

Let's say you really need help with your algebra homework. 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 algebra. You can also choose to communicate assertively by raising your hand and politely asking your teacher to help you after she finishes helping your classmate. You can choose to react aggressively by rolling your eyes and complaining loudly about disliking algebra. The outcome will probably be that your teacher gets upset with you for disturbing the class.

I used the strategy ***predict outcomes*** when I forgot to do my English homework. We were supposed to write a poem using metaphors, but I got home late from basketball practice and just forgot to do it. The poem was a major part of my grade, and I needed to do well on it. I needed to choose a way to communicate that would ensure I didn't lose all the points for the assignment. I thought about communicating passively and just not turning anything in. When my teacher realized I hadn't turned anything in, I would probably fail the assignment. I considered communicating assertively by asking for more time. If I asked nicely, my teacher might let me turn the poem in late. I could have chosen to communicate aggressively, blaming the basketball coach for keeping us late at practice or blaming the teacher for not giving us enough time to complete the assignment. The result would probably be that both my coach and teacher would be upset with me. I chose to communicate assertively by saying to my teacher, "I know you asked us to turn our poems in today, but I forgot to write mine. I'm worried about failing the assignment. I realize that I may lose a few points for completing the assignment late, but could I please have an extra day to complete it?"

When you predict outcomes, you stop and think about what could happen if you used passive, assertive, or aggressive 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.