

How to reduce stress by learning to be assertive

One way to manage stress is to speak up and be assertive. People cannot read your mind, even though you wish they could. It is up to you to learn to be more assertive in order to meet your needs. Set limits. Take charge of your life where and when you can. Being assertive is about respecting yourself enough to state what you want from other people. It is also about respecting other people and their right to express their own needs.

If you've never learned this skill and are unsure how to be assertive, read on. Here is a step-by-step description

EVALUATE THE SITUATION.

Do you really want to do what is being asked? Do you like the way things are going? Do you need to speak up because you are bothered? If you don't speak out, will you feel resentful, upset, anxious, down, etc.? Decide if this is time to speak up.

TIMING IS IMPORTANT.

Decide when you need to address the issue. Should you speak up immediately or do you need time to think about how you feel and the consequences of addressing the situation? Perhaps you want to organize your thoughts or decide if you are reacting to the right issue. Perhaps you need to build courage. Knowing when to confront is important. For example, asserting yourself when your spouse is drifting off to sleep or confronting an alcoholic when he or she is not sober is seldom productive. Time your confrontation. Choose a moment that is conducive to being heard and getting a response.

IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM.

Be specific. Don't expect others to read your mind or magically guess your distress. Say exactly what the problem is and how it is affecting you.

SAY HOW YOU FEEL.

No one causes you to feel things. You allow yourself to feel things. Don't blame others. For example, instead of saying, "Why can't you do the filing!?" say, "I find it difficult to find things when the filing isn't done." The purpose is to communicate the feeling (from your point of view) associated with the behaviour. Remember that it is important to listen to the other person point of view as well.

STATE WHAT RESOLUTION YOU DESIRE.

This is the tough but important part. You need to know what you want and what you believe would help the situation. For example, "I would like you to call me if you are going to be late. I hope you will try to make it home by 7 o'clock each evening." It is important to communicate a solution or desire so that the other person has an idea of how to remedy the problem. This doesn't guarantee they'll do what you request, but at least you've communicated what would help. You can negotiate from there.

Tips for Assertive Communication

When we communicate assertively we say what we mean and mean what we say by giving clear, straight-forward messages.

BE DIRECT

If something is to be said don't beat around the bush, get on and say it. Avoid preambles like 'I know your busy but.....'. This gives the other person the opportunity to anticipate what you're going to say and adopt a defensive dismissive attitude. It is far more affective to directly state what we are trying to get across to someone. However, that doesn't mean we have to be rude, abrupt or untactful. It merely means that we give the impression of having considered what we want to communicate. This gains the respect of others as it prevents misunderstanding. Be appropriate and be sensitive to the person you are communicating with

TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

'I think.....'; 'My opinion is.....'; 'My understanding is....'. Are more effective ways of getting our view across than 'You are.....' or 'That 's not right.....'. We all have our own opinions but ours is not the only one.

REMAIN CALM AND IN CONTROL

It's difficult to be assertive when you are feeling tense. Taking deep breaths and letting some of the obvious tension drain from you will help.

BE WILLING TO LISTEN

Mutual respect is a vital aspect of assertiveness. Listening to other people's points of view is as important as expressing our own views of the situation.

Next time you feel stressed because you failed to be assertive, practice this skill. It will get easier the more you do it. The result will be a happier you!