## Is assertiveness selfish?

Selfish means being excessively or exclusively concerned with oneself, which is not assertiveness. Assertiveness does not involve dismissing or ignoring the needs of others—instead, it focuses on the legitimate and important needs that you need to meet for yourself in order to be a fulfilled, honest, well-rounded person.

## What’s the difference between assertiveness and aggression?

Assertiveness is not aggression. Aggressive means expressing one’s rights at the expense of another or forcibly denying the rights of others. If you struggle with being assertive, you may have mislabeled assertive behavior by others as aggressive. This mislabeling may make you think its okay to not be assertive, but you shouldn’t let this prevent you from taking steps to improve your assertiveness skills.

Assertiveness is the ability to positively and constructively state your rights or needs without violating the rights of others. When you use direct, open, and honest communication in relationships to meet your personal needs, you feel more confident, gain respect from others, and live a happier, fulfilled life. Acting assertive helps maintain honesty in relationships, allows you to feel more in control of your world, and improves your ability to make decisions. Use the below tips and information to learn about what you can do to be more assertive.

### Assertiveness tips

* Express your wants and needs through using “I statements” such as: “I want,” “I need,” “I would prefer,” “I do not like,” “I am upset about,” etc.
* Be careful not to minimize such statements by couching them with questions that subordinate your needs, such as: “I don’t want to go to the store with you – do you mind?” or “I’m tired, can you do the dishes tonight — is that okay with you?”
* Keep an assertiveness journal, and make notes of the following factors each time an opportunity to be assertive arises:
  + What was the specific event that called for an assertiveness response—what personal right was involved (i.e., the right to say “no”)?
  + How did you respond—what did you say?
  + What did you do well in this situation?
  + Write reminders to yourself about what you will do next time to be assertive if this situation arises again.
* Recognize what causes your lack of assertiveness, and commit to change.
* Practice assertiveness skills—this helps you confront old ways of thinking, helps you become more naturally assertive, and is self-reinforcing.
* Be patient with your progress—in the beginning, you won’t be assertive at every opportunity and you might be assertive in some situations where it isn’t necessary, but you should recognize your general improvements and give yourself a pat on the back.

## Roadblocks to assertiveness

Fear that you will harm others or that you will experience rejection and feel shame may prevent you from acting assertive. This is based on a belief that other people's needs, opinions, and judgments are more important than your own. Believing assertiveness hurts other people can keep you from meeting your legitimate physical and emotional needs, and you may feel hurt, anxious or angry about life as a result.

Lessons learned from parents or caregivers contribute to your beliefs about the legitimacy of your personal rights, and you may have learned to act passive about your personal rights due to these beliefs. A few examples of personal rights include the right to decide how to lead your life, the right to pursue goals and dreams, the right to a valid opinion, the right to say how you want to be treated, the right to say "no," the right to change your mind, the right to privacy, the right to ask for help, and many more. Acting to assert any of these rights leads many people to think they are acting selfish when they are actually just being assertive.

## Assertiveness coaching

Being assertive isn’t easy for everybody. You may have a personal history or childhood experiences that serve as strong roadblocks to the changes you want to make. You can confidentially contact the Faculty/Employee Assistance Program at 646-1165 to help find your voice, and for help finding resources—especially professional counseling assistance—to help you make faster progress in being assertive.