

BE MORE ASSERTIVE

HOW TO STAND UP FOR YOURSELF



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Presented by

Bethann Gilson

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How to Stand Up for Yourself

Introduction

“Be nice.”

From the time we were children, we are told to be nice. We are told to share, to take turns, to be kind to others. To let others go first when getting in line. Or to allow someone else to take the first cookie. Of course, it's good to be nice, to be helpful and kind. Unfortunately, many of us take being nice to the extreme, and we can quickly become doormats for others to use.

As a society, we often use the words “assertive” and “aggressive” interchangeably. But they don't mean the same thing at all. In our attempts to “be nice,” we often end up allowing other people to walk all over us. We become so caught up in taking care of others that we forget to take care of ourselves. And in the end, we're not much better than a doormat that's seen too much use.

The question then becomes a simple one: Is it possible to stand up for yourself without becoming a jerk? The answer lies first in understanding just what it means to be assertive and how that's different from aggression. From there, we'll look at the trouble with being aggressive and how to get past that to where you can stand up for yourself. Then, believe it or not, we'll talk about when it's appropriate to be aggressive. Keep in mind that the patterns of the past don't need to dictate the future. The journey from stepped on to stepping up isn't as hard as you think.

Assertive vs. Aggressive

How can you tell when you're assertive – which is good – from being aggressive – which usually isn't? (Though aggression has its uses, as you'll see later.)

Start by asking these questions:

1. How do you treat those around you?

Aggression doesn't consider others. When you're aggressive, you're generally not thinking about whether someone is going to be hurt or if there might be negative consequences to your behavior.

An assertive individual values the input of others but also recognizes certain innate equality for everyone else. In that way, an assertive person acknowledges that while they have a right to express themselves, so do those around them. Being assertive doesn't have to be at the cost of others. There's no competition to come out on top because the goal is merely to make their point and for people to hear them, end of the story. There are no winners or losers. There don't have to be casualties in that situation. The outcome is different when trying to reason with someone who is behaving aggressively.

2. How do you view yourself?

Aggression has to always come out on top. An aggressive person has to win in all things – whether it's in conversation, in sports, in relationships, or in life itself. But the aggressive person not only *wants* to win – in their minds they *deserve* to win.

Assertive people see themselves as equals with the world around them. That's because they not only value what others have to offer, but they also value themselves as well.

3. What happens when someone else is talking?

The aggressive person doesn't typically listen to anyone because their total focus is on what they want. It's not unusual for them to talk over the other person, interrupting them, or otherwise showing a casual disrespect to what the other person has to say. Aggressive people will often be loud and abusive, as well.

Assertive people recognize that other people have valuable input and listen when others are speaking. Yes, they expect their turn to speak, but they realize that they'll get a turn, too.

How to be Assertive

When asked how to be assertive, your first answer might be to 'stand up for yourself.' But sometimes that's easier said than done. The good news is there are specific steps to help you make your needs known in a way that isn't aggressive but rather is assertive.

1. Start with asking for what you want without assuming that the person you're talking to already knows.

2. Establish the boundaries of the conversation. If the other person is being aggressive, either kindly shut them down or walk away.

3. Hold the other person in the conversation accountable for their actions. If they claim something or act aggressively, politely call them on it.

4. Express yourself clearly and succinctly. Maintain a calm, even tone, and speak to the other person with respect. If this is getting difficult, then step away until you can come back with confidence.

5. Explain what you want and why. Express why it's important to you, and why you feel this should be important to the listener.

6. Allow yourself the idea that you might succeed and be prepared to accept success gracefully. Likewise, acknowledge failure with the same grace, even if you plan to try again.

Why do we have trouble being assertive?

Even with a clear-cut set of instructions, sometimes it's hard to be assertive. Why do we struggle with something so basic as standing up for ourselves?

A lot of it goes back to our childhoods, as mentioned earlier. We learn:

- Don't offend others
- Don't ask for things – it's rude
- Don't want stuff – that's selfish
- Don't hurt people's feelings – they won't be your friends if you do

Then add to that we were rewarded every time we went out of our way to help someone else or put aside our own needs for the sake of someone else's.

Being assertive means having to let go of a lot of internal programming. Until you build the habit, you're going to need to be consciously aware of what you're doing and why. Don't be surprised if your automatic response goes against being assertive for a while.

Know when to be assertive and stand up for yourself

When should you be assertive? The answer varies from situation to situation, but these general guidelines should help:

1. When you have a want or need that you're not sure people realize you have. It's up to you to make your needs known – people cannot read minds!

2. When people don't seem to know what action you want them to take. You're going to want to jump in and make sure people know what you want. Ask questions. Verify your goals with them. Assertiveness especially helps when you're trying to make decisions without a lot of data. Sometimes you need to be assertive to push those items through to get on to other more important things.

3. When you need to find common ground with someone else or in a group. Being assertive here will help you to figure out what universal truth draws you together and will give you a place from which to work and move forward.

4. When the boundaries of your relationships are not clear. By asserting where you stand emotionally with another person, you can better establish the depth and future of the relationship.

5. When you need to get support for a cause. Being assertive can help put the focus where you need it to be, especially if that focus is already wandering.

6. When you feel like you or someone else is being marginalized or treated poorly. Or when you need to defuse something that's quickly getting out of control. It's always important to stand up for those who remain unheard or those who don't have a voice. In a volatile situation, being calm and assertive can take the heat out of something that could escalate into something violent.

In every case here, you're either standing up for yourself or are making yourself a representative of a group and standing up for the group as a whole. While there might be other situations where you find you need to be assertive, this should at least give you some general guidelines as to when it's appropriate to be assertive.

Is there ever a time to be aggressive?

Before you go and think that there's never a cause to be aggressive, you need to recognize that aggression does serve a purpose. When you're dealing with a situation that calls for clear winners and losers, for example, aggression isn't only expected but necessary. You couldn't play football or fight in a war without aggression.

In the examples below, aggression is necessary:

- When defending yourself or someone else from a physical attack
- When your group needs a pep talk (think of a coach with their team before a big game)
- When rallying a group behind a cause
- When you have a situation where you need to 'win the day'

Conclusion

This may seem like a lot to remember, I know. But when you think how important it is to stand up for yourself, it's easy to see where being assertive is not only beneficial but necessary for your mental health and well-being.

The trap of being a "people pleaser" feels so good until you realize just what it costs you. By consistently put everyone else's needs before your own, the long-term

consequences to your self-esteem are deadly. Do it often enough, and you'll forget that your needs matter, or even that YOU matter.

Learning how to be assertive and stand up for yourself is a valuable life skill to keep in your toolkit. Assertiveness helps you set and maintain your personal boundaries to live the life that you have dreamed of without sacrificing your needs or the needs of others.

Thank you for taking the time to read this ebook. If you are interested in learning more about putting yourself first, look for my course "How to Live Authentically in a World of Faking It!" This powerful course leads you on a step-by-step journey to true, freeing authenticity, a journey of reflection, clarification, courage, self-acceptance, and love.

This powerful journey could absolutely change your life.

You could look back on THIS as the time:

- when you discovered true authenticity
- when you were set free
- when you stopped being what OTHERS wanted and became the person you were DESTINED to be

This is your moment. See you at the start of your journey.