

# Co-operantics

## Co-operative skills for everyone

### Are you assertive?

Behaviour towards others can be classified as either:

- Aggressive – trying to get your own way by bullying or other power strategies
- Passive – accepting other people's opinions or decisions
- Manipulative – using underhand or devious strategies to get your own way
- Assertive – neither passive nor aggressive, but standing up for yourself and your ideas, without pushing others around and without being pushed around yourself.

**How do I know?** Take a look at the list of questions below - what would you normally do?

		Often	Sometimes	Never
1	Do you speak out in protest when someone else takes your place in the queue?			x
2	Do you avoid people or situations for fear of embarrassment?			x
3	Do you have confidence in your own judgement?	x		
4	Do you insist that your spouse or partner takes their share of the housework?		x	
5	Are you reluctant to speak up in a debate or discussion?		x	
6	If someone has borrowed a book or some money, and is late returning it, do you mention it?		x	
7	Do you generally express what you feel?		x	
8	Do you find it difficult to maintain eye contact when talking to another person?			x
9	When goods are faulty or not what you expected when you paid for them, do you return them?	x		
10	Do you often step in and make decisions for others?			x
11	Do you avoid telling the whole story in order to get people to agree with you?		x	
12	Are you often a wallflower in social situations?	x		
13	Do you think you always have the right answer?		x	
14	When you disagree with someone you respect, are you able to speak up for your own viewpoint?	x		
15	Are you able to refuse unreasonable requests from friends?	x		
16	If you are disturbed by someone smoking near you, can you say so?		x	
17	Do you finish other people's sentences for them?			x

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As you can see, we all tend to exhibit a mix of passive, aggressive and assertive behaviours. However, co-operatives need assertive members – to inform and educate themselves, to have opinions and to know how to express and defend them, without pushing other people around and without being pushed around themselves. We can all learn to be more assertive.

### How to be more assertive:

1. Remind yourself you have the right to feel anger, to say “No,” to ask for help, and to make mistakes.
2. Avoid using tag questions. “*It’s really hot today, isn’t it?*”, disclaimers “*I may be wrong, but...*” and question statements “*won’t you close the door?*” – which all lessen the perceived assertiveness of speech.
3. Resist giving into interruptions until you have completed your thoughts. Instead, say – “*Just a moment, I haven’t finished*”
4. Stop self-limiting behaviours, such as smiling too much, nodding too much, tilting your head, or dropping your eyes in response to another person’s gaze.
5. When saying “No” be decisive. Explain why you are refusing but don’t be overly apologetic.
6. Use “I” language (this is especially useful for expressing negative feelings.) “I” language helps you focus your anger constructively and to be clear about your own feelings. For example:

*When you do ...* (concrete example)

*I feel ...* (acknowledge feeling)

*And I want you to ...* (specific, positive request)

If appropriate, you might explain:

*Because ...* (explanation or reason)

7. Maintain direct eye contact, keep your posture open and relaxed, be sure your facial expression agrees with the message, and keep a level, well-modulated tone of voice.
8. Listen and let people know you have heard what they said. Ask questions for clarification.

<https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/Assertiveness.htm>