

How to be an Assertive Nurse ?

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Assertiveness is frequently misunderstood. Some people believe you have to be confident to be assertive. But being assertive is less about being confident and more about valuing yourself and your profession. Becoming more assertive can lead to increased respect and recognition as a person and as a nurse. It can get you more of what you want. Becoming more assertive is a process. It's not something that happens overnight. You can, however, make some small changes now to start moving in the right direction. Assertiveness is an antidote to fear, shyness, passivity, and even anger. As nurses work in different situations they have to be assertive in order to meet the challenges and to win the cooperation from others.

What is Assertiveness?

Assertiveness is the ability to express yourself and your rights without violating the rights of others. It means that we have respect both for ourselves and for others. We are consciously working toward a "win-win" solution to problems. A win-win solution means that we are trying to make sure that both parties end up with their needs met to the degree possible. An assertive person effectively influences, listens, and negotiates so that others choose to cooperate willingly.

Assertiveness is very different from aggressiveness. Aggressiveness involves expressing our thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in a way that is inappropriate and violates the rights of others. By being

aggressive, we put our wants, needs, and rights above those of others. Where assertiveness tries to find a win-win solution, aggressiveness strives for a win-lose solution: "I'll be the winner; you'll be the loser".

Assertiveness is also different from non-assertiveness. Non-assertive behavior is passive and indirect. It permits others to violate our rights and shows a lack of respect for our own needs. It communicates a message of inferiority. It creates a lose-win situation because the non-assertive person thinks his or her own needs are secondary and opts to be a victim.

Specific Techniques for being Assertive

Be as specific and clear as possible about what you want, think, and feel. The following statements project this preciseness:

- a. "I want to..."
- b. "I don't want you to..."
- c. "I like it when you did that."
- d. "I have a different opinion, I think that..."

Be direct: Deliver your message to the person for whom it is intended. If you want to tell Sheila something, tell Sheila; do not tell everyone except Sheila.

"Own" your message: You can acknowledge ownership with personalized ("I") statements such as "I don't agree with you" (as compared to "You're wrong") or "I would like to talk without being interrupted" (as compared to "You always interrupt my talk").

Ask for feedback: Am I being clear? Asking for feedback can encourage others to correct any

misperceptions you may have as well as help others realize that you are expressing an opinion, feeling, or desire rather than a demand. Encourage others to be clear, direct, and specific in their feedback to you.

Stop apologizing all the time: Many of us say "I'm sorry" on a regular basis without even thinking about it. Although we say it in an effort to be polite, it sounds like we're apologizing. When you say you're sorry all the time, it sounds as if you're taking the blame for everything that happens. It makes you seem like a self-appointed scapegoat. Don't say "I'm sorry" unless you've done something you truly need to apologize for.

Learn to take a compliment: When complimented on a job well done, many of us, could have responded: "Oh, I didn't do anything" "It was nothing" or "Don't mention it". It was the team that did all the work." A more appropriate response would be to say: "Thank you. I had a great team to work with on this." Accepting a genuine compliment is not a sign of conceit and when you deflect a compliment, you're basically saying, "My actions were meaningless or minimal and unworthy of acknowledgement."

Don't be self-deprecating: Merriam Webster defines self-deprecating as "belittling or undervaluing oneself; excessively modest." Although modesty is an admirable trait, taking it to an extreme is counterproductive.

Act confident even if you don't feel confident: Force yourself to make good eye contact with people and use a steady, audible voice when

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speaking. Stand or sit erect with your head upright and straight on your shoulders, not tilted to the side or bent forward. Act like you have a right to be there, even if you don't feel that way. If someone attempts to interrupt you while you're talking, keep talking until you are done and raise the volume of your voice if necessary to be heard. If you stop talking midstream in an effort to be "polite," you are making a statement that they have more of a right to speak than you do.

Feel free to say "I don't know", "I don't understand" and "no." Feel free to change your mind and make requests when necessary.

Read the points given below, analyse self and decide the category to which you belong to. If you are not assertive, take steps right now and try to be assertive.

- ◆ Allow others to complete their thoughts before you speak.
- ◆ Make your own decisions based on what you think is right
- ◆ Look to friendships as opportunities to learn more about yourself and others and to share ideas.
- ◆ Spontaneously and naturally enter into conversations using a moderate tone and reasonable volume of voice.
- ◆ Try to understand the feelings of others before describing your own.
- ◆ Try to avoid harm and inconvenience by talking out your problems before they occur or finding rational means for coping with unavoidable harm or inconvenience.
- ◆ Face problems and decisions squarely.
- ◆ Consider yourself strong and capable, but generally equal to most other people.
- ◆ Face responsibility with respect to your situation, needs

and rights.

On being Non-assertive

- ◆ Stay in the back of groups.
- ◆ Always stick to the middle-of-the road position.
- ◆ Allow others to make decisions for you.
- ◆ Always keep your voice low or avoid eye contact to keep from calling attention to yourself.
- ◆ Verbally agree with others despite your real feelings.
- ◆ Bring harm or inconvenience to yourself to avoid harming or inconveniencing others.
- ◆ Procrastinate to avoid problems and to keep from making decisions.
- ◆ Always consider yourself weaker and less capable than others.
- ◆ Always escape responsibility with excuses and "good" reasons.

Problems with being non-assertive

- ◆ You may end up with shoddy merchandise and service.
- ◆ You bottle up your feelings.
- ◆ You are not doing anything to improve a bad situation.
- ◆ You get involved in situations you would rather not be in.
- ◆ You end up being a "yes" person - having to do all the work while others sit by and watch.
- ◆ You run into communication barriers because nobody is willing to say what he or she really wants.

On being aggressive

- ◆ Interrupt others when they are speaking.
- ◆ Try to impose your position as compared to others.
- ◆ Make decisions for others.
- ◆ Use and abuse friendships.
- ◆ Accuse, blame, and find fault with others without regard to their feelings.

- ◆ Bring harm or cause inconvenience to others rather than bring or cause inconvenience to yourself.
- ◆ Speak beside the issue, distort the facts, or misrepresent the truth to get your solutions accepted quickly.
- ◆ Consider yourself stronger and more capable than others.
- ◆ Accept responsibility and positions of authority for the purposes of manipulation.

Reasons for not being assertive

- ◆ Laziness.
- ◆ Apathy.
- ◆ Feelings of inadequacy.
- ◆ Fear of being considered unworthy, unloved, or unacceptable.
- ◆ Fear of hurting the other person or making him or her angry.
- ◆ Fear of getting no reinforcement.
- ◆ Fear of not knowing how to accomplish your desired goal.
- ◆ Feeling that if you don't do it, someone else will.

References

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