

Why Change?

The consequences of nonassertive (passive) behavior are numerous: you always get stuck with the unpleasant jobs; you don't get paid what you deserve; strangers cut in front of you in lines at the supermarket; you always do what others want instead of what you want; you may avoid social situations because you feel too anxious in them.

If you are aggressive, on the other hand, you may find that you're the one who always has to phone friends, that others won't willingly talk to you, or that you alienate family and friends because you always have to have your own way. In either case, you may think less of yourself. The guilt, anger, self-doubts and anxiety you feel may lead to physical ailments such as headaches, rashes, stomach disorders, and general fatigue.

When you start asserting yourself, however, you begin to feel better; your sense of self worth increases. Others notice this and respond in a more positive way toward you. As your self-esteem increases, you become a freer person as you - not others - control your life.

Available Resources

<http://counseling.uchicago.edu/vpc/>

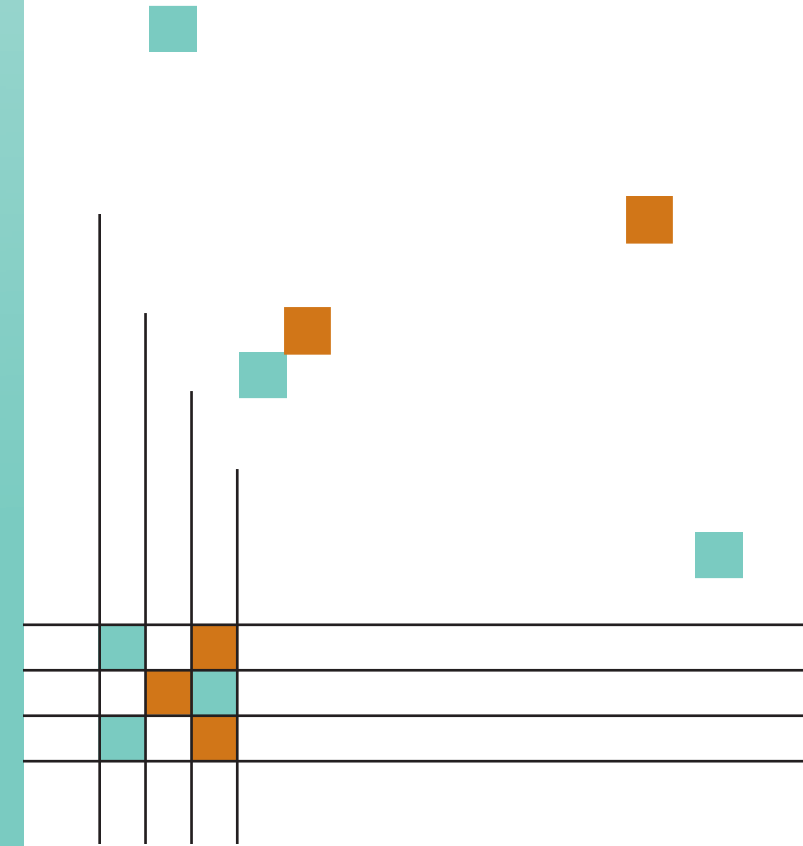
- Click on Virtual Pamphlets
- Click on Assertiveness

You may call 398-5471 to make an appointment to meet with a Kirkwood counselor.

This handout is part of a Self-Help Information Series written by Kirkwood Community College Counselors, Cedar Rapids, Iowa. 319-398-5471 or 1-800-332-2055, ext. 5471.

Please share this information with family, friends and classmates.

Assertiveness



A Communication Tool for Effective Relationships

Do you have difficulty expressing your opinion in a group of friends or in a classroom? Do you find it hard to give suggestions or to correct someone who is doing a poor job? Do you often self-consciously deny a sincerely made compliment? Do you sometimes use sarcasm and intimidation to get what you want? Do relationships with roommates or friends suffer because you are reluctant to ask them to change their behavior when it adversely affects you? These are all examples of passive or aggressive behaviors.

What is Assertiveness?

Assertiveness is the ability to express our feelings, opinions, beliefs and needs directly, openly and honestly, while not violating the personal rights of others. Some benefits of acting in an assertive way are:

1. You feel better about yourself
2. You can say “no” without feeling guilty
3. Improve your relationships with others
4. Get help when you need it
5. Speak your mind clearly and effectively
6. Disagree without seeming hostile
7. Get more respect from others
8. Feel in better control of your life

Causes

A person who does not act assertively will act either in a “nonassertive” (passive) way or “aggressively.” Some common causes of nonassertiveness are fear of being rejected, fear of making mistakes and fear of displeasing or hurting others. Often time’s “nonassertive” people are overly sensitive to others’ feelings and they fear that disagreement will be misinterpreted as dislike for the other person. Another cause is that some hold false beliefs about themselves; that they are unworthy or they don’t have any rights. They feel they are being self-centered if they assert themselves or that others’ opinions are more valid. And lastly, some people are nonassertive because they simply have never learned the skills to be assertive.

Two common causes of “aggressive” behavior are insecurity and feelings of powerlessness. Aggressive people often feel threatened and react strongly, thinking they must protect themselves. Reluctance to give up the benefits of aggression often causes people to continue to act aggressively. In the short run, aggressive behavior usually works because it intimidates other people and you get what you want. However, in the long run, the person who acts aggressively gains resentment, not respect, from others. Another cause of aggressive behavior is that some people are simply inexperienced in expressing their needs and feelings in any other way. Being assertive has many advantages over both aggressive and nonassertive actions.

Remedies

If you have a problem with acting assertively, you really can decide to change your behavior. Practice thinking calmly and rationally and develop a positive attitude. Some small steps you can take are:

1. Make a list of the most threatening to least threatening problems you have in asserting yourself, then tackle your least threatening situations first.
2. Practice before you go out to assert yourself. Anticipate the various reactions and know how to respond assertively. Ask yourself, “what is the worst thing that could happen?” and be prepared mentally to handle anything. Chances are the “worst” won’t happen.
3. Remember that body language and nonverbal behavior such as eye contact, body posture, gestures, facial expressions, voice tone, inflection and volume and timing are just as important as what you say.
4. Learn to compromise without becoming nonassertive or aggressive.
5. If something or someone bothers you, say so immediately rather than let a problem build up inside you.
6. Say exactly what you want to say. Be specific, not general. Use “I want” statements to say what you want. Use “I feel” to express your feelings. Don’t expect others to read your mind or know what you’re thinking.
7. Be sure you understand fully the principles of assertiveness before beginning.