



# Assertive Communication

“Don't try to figure out what other people want to hear from you; figure out what you have to say.”

—Barbara Kingsolver—

Assertive communication allows you to take your voice back while still respecting others. It also allows you to acknowledge that others are responsible for their own behavior.

- Assertiveness is the ability to honestly express your opinions, attitudes, and rights without undue anxiety, in a way that protects your rights while respecting the rights of others.
- It's important to set good boundaries, be firm, and deliver your messages clearly.
- Learning to say no is an important part of assertive communication. You have limits to your time, energy, and interests. Set those limits for those around you.
- Saying no is NOT rude, unkind, a rejection of others, selfish, or petty.
- When you honestly express your feelings, it makes it safe for others to do the same.
- Techniques for assertive communication include: broken record, fogging, defusing, content to process shift, assertive inquiry, summarization, and specificity.

## Three steps to assertive communication:

- **Empathy and validation**  
Listen and work to understand the other person's feelings. Express this to the other person. "I can tell that you're upset and I understand why."
- **Use "I" in a problem statement**  
Describe your difficulty/dissatisfaction and tell why you need something to change. "I'm feeling dissatisfied with... because..."
- **State what you want and what you're willing to negotiate**  
Make a request for a specific change in the other person's behavior, including where you're willing to be flexible. "I'd like... and I'll do..."

## Suggested Reading

Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High