



SELF-HELP EXERCISE: ASSERTING YOURSELF

INTRODUCTION

Are there times when you want to express an opinion or a need to someone, but you decide not to?



Combat and operational stress, fatigue, sleep deprivation, and grief can make it difficult for individuals to connect with other people in a way that feels comfortable. Even when surrounded by other people, if you aren't receiving the support you need, you can end up feeling isolated, lonely, sad, angry, or bitter.

However, there are ways to get the things you need out of your relationships. The best way to do so is to simply ask people directly for support and help. Being assertive means expressing yourself and your needs clearly while valuing and respecting the perspective, opinion, and values of the person you are talking to.

Reasons for not asserting needs and wants:

- ★ You may have experienced significant combat and operational stress and loss. This might make you feel frustrated and angry causing you to sometimes act too aggressively.
- ★ You might have less confidence in yourself since deployment or discharge because things feel so different and unfamiliar. If you feel less confident than usual, it can be hard to ask for things from others or to say no when they ask things of you.
- ★ You may feel reluctant to share your feelings with others because you believe that your emotions are too intense for others to handle or that others don't want to hear about them.
- ★ You may believe that no one can understand how it feels to survive combat or to lose someone close.
- ★ You may be reluctant to assert yourself because you feel that asking for something may make people think you are weak or needy.
- ★ It may be especially hard to assert yourself with the people you are closest to because you don't want to "burden" them.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

There are ways to assert yourself that will increase your chances of getting what you need or want.

Q: When is it important to be assertive?

A: Whenever you are facing a choice that you have the right to accept or refuse.

For example:



- ★ Expecting to get things that you deserve
- ★ Saying no to things that you don't want or that you think are unreasonable
- ★ Asking for and getting things that are reasonable from others
- ★ Speaking up and having your opinion heard and respected
- ★ Letting someone know they've upset you in some way or making your feelings known to someone



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Q: When am I not being assertive?

A: You are not being assertive if:

- ★ You feel like you're always giving in to what others want
- ★ You feel you have to act aggressively and make angry demands to get what you need



Neither of these strategies work very well! Because:

- If you're being a doormat, you won't get what you need or want and you'll feel powerless and less confident
- If you're a bully, you may get what you want in the short term, but others will resent and avoid you



Assertiveness is:

- Middle ground between acting too aggressively and too passively
- Being open to negotiating for what you want
- Being open to the idea that you might not get what you want

Q: Why is it sometimes hard to be assertive?

A: Some of the most common things that get in the way of being assertive are:

- ★ Feeling that you don't deserve to have your needs met
- ★ Feeling that others won't give you what you want or won't respond in a positive way
- ★ Feeling nervous about what might happen or what others will think of you

TIPS FOR BEING APPROPRIATELY ASSERTIVE:

Say exactly what you want or don't want: "I'd like for you to give me a ride to the airport if you are available."



Clearly explain your reasons why: "I have no other way of getting there, and I'm wondering whether you could return the favor – I've picked you up from there before."

If you need to, repeat yourself firmly and politely: "It seems unfair that I have given you rides, but you won't do the same for me. Are you sure there is no way you can do it?"

Try to use "I" statements: "I feel frustrated when..." "I feel uncomfortable when..."

Avoid "YOU" statements, which sound blaming and accusatory: "You're being a jerk. You always do that."

For example, if you have a friend who seems to never have the time to hang out anymore, you could say, "I know your work is busy, but I'd like to get back to hanging out more. What are you doing for Friday's game?"

Practice what you are going to say: Say it a few times aloud ahead of time just to yourself.



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