

How to be assertive



Information sheet from Seven steps > Step 6 > Further tools

What is assertiveness?

Assertiveness is a very important communication skill, especially where health and safety at work is involved. Many people think that being assertive means being rude, loud and aggressive. This is not true. Being assertive is about 'making sure your voice is heard', not about 'getting your own way'. It will enable you to clearly and persuasively explain why you feel something should be done.

Being assertive means:

- taking responsibility for yourself;
- being unafraid to ask for help and support when you need it;
- being able to say what you think/feel without losing your temper;
- standing up to difficult people;
- being able to give and receive feedback; and
- knowing it's okay to say 'no', when you need to.

Why is being assertive important?

Health and safety is the responsibility of everyone in the workplace. Some people may not feel comfortable asking for the right safety equipment or suggesting to a co-worker that they take better care. However, if we say or do nothing about such risks for fear of offending/making someone angry, this can lead to accidents and people can get hurt. That is why it is important to be assertive and make sure your voice is heard.

In what workplace situations should I be assertive?

Being assertive is important when:

- someone asks you to work in an unsafe or unhealthy way and you know you need to say 'no';
- you need to ask for the right safety equipment to do the job;
- you need to challenge procedures you believe are unsafe;
- you don't understand or are unsure about workplace procedures and need to ask your site supervisor or manager;
- you know you need to wear PPE but others around you are choosing not to;
- giving feedback to any co-workers you think are not following health and safety procedures; and
- reporting any issues you find to the site supervisor or manager.

Principles to help you be more assertive

- Always ask questions about anything you don't understand.
- Think first, react second – it's hard to do both simultaneously.
- Don't say 'yes' just to please someone, when you really mean 'no'.
- Maintain eye contact during conversations.
- Be clear and specific about what you want to say – stick to the point and don't make it personal.
- Be polite, but firm.
- Give praise where it is due.
- Explain the advantages or benefits of what you are talking about.



Verbal tips and techniques

You can be assertive and get your point across by simply making small changes in how you speak to people.

The broken record:

Sometimes it can be helpful to use the 'broken record' technique – simply repeating a phrase (perhaps with a little variation) – to get the desired result. For example, consider this conversation:

"I need to get replacement ear defenders."

"We don't have any in stores."

"I need the ear defenders before I can start work using the drill."

"We won't have any in until next week."

"I can't start working with the drill until I get them."

"I'll contact the suppliers to get a rush delivery."

I statements

Many people do not appreciate the impact their decisions have on other people. This is why using 'I' statements can be helpful – saying what you think and feel about a situation, rather than being seen as critical or attacking of someone else.

Try using:

- *I think*
- *I feel*
- *I need*

– instead of statements starting:

- *you shouldn't*
- *you didn't*
- *you haven't*

The Leadership and Worker Involvement toolkit is aimed particularly at small and medium sized businesses and is designed to help improve your health and safety and bring additional benefits to your business performance and productivity.