

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Express yourself assertively

TIP SHEET

Relationships Australia WA's education team have developed a range of tips to help support you during the COVID-19 outbreak. As a free resource, we encourage you to share this with your community.

Expressing ourselves assertively can be difficult, because our needs may be in opposition to someone else's needs or wants. This can be particularly challenging during these times of self-isolation where we may be sharing our homes with family and/or friends.

The other factor to consider during the COVID-19 restrictions is that we may feel an additional pressure to 'keep the peace' at home, and as a result forego our own needs.

While this may work in the short term, over time we can become frustrated, irritated and resentful that our needs are not being met. This can result in conflict simply because we didn't communicate our needs from the outset.

Ultimately, using assertive communication during the COVID-19 restrictions can promote a more harmonious household, and help strengthen relationships with family and friends.

Here are some suggestions to help you learn how to express yourself assertively during this time:

- **Understand assertiveness and how it helps in our communication**

Assertiveness is when we communicate our own needs or wants in a way that maintains respect for the other person, and maintains respect for ourselves. It honours the fact that both individuals have needs and wants, and that both are equally as important.

The underlying messages when we are being assertive are:

- "This is what I think, what do you think?"
- "This is what I feel, what are your feelings?"
- This is how I see the situation, what is your view of it?"

- **Understand how you can achieve assertiveness**

Firstly, be clear on what you want to communicate, and consider how you are going to say it. Then give thought to how it might impact on the other person. If the impact is likely to be heavy or difficult for the person to hear, work on delivering the information as gently as you can.

Sometimes breaking down the information into chunks can help give the other person time to process what you are saying. It is important after you have expressed your needs that you listen to the response from the other person and consider it before responding back.

Using 'I' Statements

'I' statements follow a formula that can help us communicate our needs assertively. They give us a way of mapping out what we want to say and can make asking for our needs a little bit easier. The elements of an 'I' statement are:

- **'When'**. Firstly we give a neutral description of the behaviour or the situation.
- **'I feel'**. Next, we give an accurate statement of our feelings, without blame or provocation. It is important we maintain responsibility for our feelings in this step (that we avoid blaming others).
- **'And what I would prefer is'**. We then give the other person an alternative to the behaviour or situation in this step, so they are not guessing about what we would like to happen.

Example of an 'I' statement:

"When the kitchen is continually left in a messy state, I feel overwhelmed by the untidiness because we are spending most of our time at home now. What I would prefer is everyone cleans as they go so we all have a more pleasant environment to live in during these restrictive times."

Why do they work? By giving someone this information, we are helping them to understand things from our perspective and in a sense 'inviting them' to change. We can't force them to. Using 'I' statements may not immediately resolve an issue, but they provide a starting point for an open discussion.

Practice is important

It is important not to be discouraged if your first attempts at 'I' statements don't go as smoothly as you would like. As with any new skill, practice makes perfect. At first you might want to write down your 'I' statement and practice it before you have the conversation. Don't be discouraged if it feels a little 'clunky', just practice, practice, practice!

As we journey through these challenging times, please reach out for support and connection amongst your community or if you'd like further support from Relationships Australia WA you can call us on 1300 364 277.

Our Education team will continue to facilitate Relationship Australia WA's seminars, workshops and courses face-to-face once government guidelines allow. You might like to like us on Facebook to keep up to date with support information and details of services we can offer during this time.

If you'd like to register your interest in attending a course on **Express yourself assertively** once available, or any of our other courses, please email education@relationshipsaustralia.org.au or call 6164 0200.