

Express yourself assertively

TIP SHEET

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

Expressing yourself assertively can be difficult because everyone's needs and wants are different. It can be particularly challenging during times when you may be sharing your home with family and/or friends. You may feel additional pressure to 'keep the peace' at home, and as a result, forego your own needs.

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

By using assertive communication, you can contribute to 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:

1. Understand assertiveness and how it helps in communication

Assertiveness is when you communicate your own needs or wants in a way that maintains respect for the other person, as well as yourself. 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?"

2. 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 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 parts 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.

3. Using 'I' Statements

'I' statements follow a formula that can help you communicate your needs assertively. They give you a way of mapping out what you want to say and can make asking for your needs a little bit easier.

The elements of an 'I' statement include:

- 'When.' Firstly give a neutral description of the behaviour or the situation.
- 'I feel.' Next, give an accurate statement of your feelings, without blame or provocation. It is important you maintain responsibility for your feelings in this step and avoid blaming others.
- 'And what I would prefer is.' Then give the other person an alternative to the current behaviour or situation, so they are not guessing about what you 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."

By giving someone this information, you are helping them to understand things from your perspective and 'inviting them' to change. Using 'I' statements may not immediately resolve an issue, but they provide a starting point for an open discussion.

4. 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, it requires practice. 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 are continuing to facilitate Relationship Australia WA's seminars, workshops and courses face-to-face and online.

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