

## What are the characteristics of assertive people?

Above all, being assertive means respecting oneself. The capacity to initiate constructive and healthy interpersonal relationships based on a sense of mutual respect can only develop from a deep respect for oneself, for one's individuality and one's uniqueness. Our relationships with other people are often difficult, not very clearly defined and can also be a source of anxiety. This is nothing other than the result of misunderstandings caused by an inability to relate to others in an open and honest manner. If we are not honest with ourselves, how can we expect to be sincere with other people? Assertiveness implies understanding our own individual way of being, accepting it and not being afraid of revealing it to the people around us. By hiding our true self we will only generate misunderstanding and a sense of malaise within interpersonal relationships. Assertiveness is a skill we can acquire over time and a capacity that should be maintained. We should also avoid assuming extreme attitudes in one sense or the other. The capacity of being assertive in fact varies between two extremes, the first being that of total passivity, the incapacity to assume a particular stance in the presence of others and difficulty in relating to them, and the second being that of an excessive self-confidence, which may eventually turn into an aggressive attitude, whereby one would tend to prevaricate and impose one's will upon other people and pay no attention at all to their needs. Neither of these extremes can be considered as adequate and, once again, the middle path is best. An assertive, healthy and balanced attitude requires that we present our own point of view and draw attention to our needs and at the same time that we heed and take note of the needs and points of view of those around us. Assertive people can express their feelings and model their behaviour and decisions according to the context of the moment and they have the capacity to defend and uphold their own rights whenever a situation requires such action. An assertive person can do all of this without imposing his or her own will on other people and, inversely, without passively submitting to the will of others. Assertive people are not afraid to firmly express their opinions and when they are confronted by others, they are capable of reacting and if necessary may ask the person who has challenged them to modify his or her behaviour if considered inappropriate. In order to develop an optimum degree of assertiveness three fundamental requisites have to be ensured: the first of these is knowledge of oneself (an awareness of one's inner world, i.e., one's attitudes, one's needs, weak and strong points, etc), the second a healthy level of self-esteem (self-confidence and self-respect) and the third being respect for others. When developed to an appropriate degree, these three qualities give rise to what we can define as assertive behaviour, which facilitates and promotes the growth of constructive and open interpersonal relations. Being assertive does not mean that one is an egotist. Egotistic people do not consider other people's needs and are exclusively concerned about their own demands and expectations, while the assertive individual comprehends the needs of others and takes them into consideration. Unlike passive individuals and egotistic/egocentric types, an assertive person will present the following characteristics:

1. The capacity to express one's feelings. Assertive people can share with others what they are feeling, without any sense of shame or fear of being misunderstood or judged.
2. No need to offer justifications. When assertive individuals express their opinions or let others know what their tastes, choices and values are, they do not feel obliged to simultaneously provide a motivation or justification for their preferences. When challenged by someone who contradicts them and expresses disapproval they will be able to respond in a simple and decisive manner (for example, saying, "This is what I think," or "These are the values I abide by")
3. No fear of confrontation or comparison. On entering into a discussion with someone, in an assertive personality there is no fear of measuring oneself with an interlocutor in relation to the various topics discussed, also when the individual knows he/she is less competent or knowledgeable.
4. Admitting one's mistakes or a change in one's opinion. Assertive types know very well that anyone can make a mistake or change their mind. They are thus sincere and honest with themselves and with others, admitting any errors they may have committed and confessing any change in their opinions, without experiencing feelings of excessive inadequacy or ineptitude as a result of their action.
5. Persistence. When assertive individuals say something they believe is important and are nevertheless ignored, they are capable of reiterating their ideas until they are given the attention they feel they deserve.
6. Defending one's rights. Assertive types do not let others step on their toes or exploit them. If necessary, they will make sure other people respect them and they are not afraid of offending a person by whom they have been challenged, and they are not hindered by feelings of guilt.
7. The capability to say "no". When they disagree with someone, they are capable of expressing their point of view, while maintaining a respectful tone in whatever they say.
8. Asking for an explanation. If someone says something that is not clear or makes excessive or unreasonable demands, they seek clarification. Nor are they afraid to admit they have not understood what a person has said or that they need further explanation.
9. Speaking about oneself. When assertive people want to say something about themselves, such as referring to an important experience or the attainment of a personal goal, they do so without monopolizing or interrupting a conversation.
10. Accepting compliments. When someone makes a positive remark concerning them, they will accept it without trying to decrease or increase its value, and in any case, without saying things like, "No, that's not really true" or "Please don't exaggerate".

## About the Author

Luca Govoni is author of this article on [Psychology portal about anxiety and stress](#). Find more information about [Psychology articles](#) here.