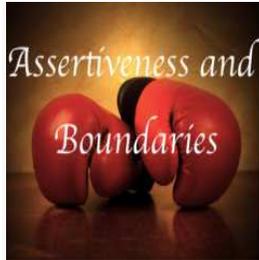


Being Assertive in a relationship

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Do you struggle to ask for what you want? Do you put up with things for a quiet life? Fear rocking the boat? Hate it when trying to say how you feel or what you want turns into a row? Would you like to be able to say assertively what you want in a way that is easy to hear and act upon?

Asking for what you want—and setting boundaries around what you don't want—is a key life skill. But sometimes in our enthusiasm to practice this skill, we over-do our own assertiveness and end up with a partner who shuts down, gets angry or feels resentful. Here are four tips for developing your assertiveness in a way that will actually strengthen, deepen and enrich your

relationship—thus avoiding the “alienation trap”:



1. Get Clear.

Being assertive starts with knowing what you are—and aren't—willing to be, do, or have. For many of us, coming to this knowledge is a real task in itself. Here, it may be useful to ask: “What would I like to have happen?” Focusing on a desired outcome opens our minds, prevents us from falling into passivity or “victim-thinking,” and helps us get really clear on what we want and don't want.



2. Set Boundaries.

Once you know what outcome you want, share it with your partner. Pay attention to the way stating your boundary feels in your body. With practice, you can clearly sense when you're really expressing yourself. It can feel really pleasurable, even exhilarating, to express your needs or desires out loud. A good way to state your boundary is "When you.....(do the thing I don't want), I feel..... (the feeling that accompanies this experience for me – try starting with sad, angry, or afraid – most feelings are variations on these three) what I would like is for you to (State the behavior you want instead)". These are simple ways of being assertive while maintaining connection with your partner.

3. Make a Regular Habit of Stating Your Needs and Desires.

You can build your assertiveness the same way you build any muscle: exercise.

Practice speaking up about your needs, big or small, on a daily basis. When you speak up about things that are less controversial—such as where to go to dinner, requesting help unloading the dishwasher or what TV program to watch—both you and your partner get used to your assertiveness. It becomes easier for you to practice and for your partner to hear. Also, when bigger issues come along, you and your partner will have a healthy process in place for dealing with differences in needs, and you'll have greater confidence in the resilience of your partnership.

4. Give as Much as You Get.

Assertiveness is a two-way street. If you want your boundaries to be respected, you must return the courtesy to your partner. If she doesn't want you to use the bathroom when she's in the shower, don't. If he asks you to give him a half an hour after work before you talk and connect, respect that. When it comes to following through on a partner's reasonable request, actions really do speak louder than words.

If your partner isn't respecting your boundaries even though you've set them clearly, it may be time to seek professional counseling help for you and/or your relationship.