



# Building Assertiveness into Your Communication

## How to Effectively Bring Your Voice to Difficult Conversations

Whether you are prone to feeling like an avoidant, shrinking violet in your interactions, or a dominant over-reacher, better ways of communicating are possible.

One key is healthy assertiveness. First, let's be clear. Assertiveness is not the same as aggressiveness. Assertiveness is a skill that involves owning, valuing, and appropriately sharing your own thoughts, beliefs, and needs while respecting others.

This article will provide you with a few tips on how to begin building assertiveness into your communication.

### **i. Build Rapport**

Building rapport is an important first step. It allows for greater understanding in our exchanges with others. Here are some ways to build rapport.

- **Check for Understanding**—If someone initiates a conversation with you, let your first response be to check that you've understood what they are saying: "What I hear you saying is...."
- **Affirm What You Can Affirm**—Once you've received confirmation that you've accurately understood what the other person has said, give some affirmation, or at least some acknowledgment. Even if you disagree with what the person is saying or what the person wants, you can still affirm or acknowledge the person: "It sounds like this is really important to you." "I appreciate that you shared your feelings about...." "I agree, it can be so difficult to navigate that type of scenario."

- Ask Questions to Gain Greater Insight—Not only does this build rapport, it also helps to deepen your understanding, which in turn can help boost your confidence as it pertains to what your response should be.
- Be Invitational—If you are the one initiating the conversation, keep rapport building at the forefront by using an invitational approach. Asking a question is one way of doing this: "I was thinking about the conversation we had yesterday about how much money we've been spending on repairs for the car. What are your thoughts on purchasing a new car?" Here's another way to initiate in an invitational manner in order to build rapport: "I was hoping that we could discuss the option of a new car. I know you mentioned that it's not a good idea. I'd like to hear more of your thoughts on that, and I'd also like to share my thoughts."



**Please Keep in Mind**

These steps pertain to interactions with mentally and emotionally healthy individuals. If you are in a dynamic where the person is dangerous, get appropriate help. If you are trying to engage with someone who is unwilling to engage in a reasonable and healthy manner, walking away from the conversation might be the best course of action. Use wisdom and discretion.

**2. Own and Share Your Thoughts/Concerns using "I" Statements**

- After having listened well as outlined above, share your thoughts, feelings, and wants about the situation: "I know that purchasing a new car is a big financial commitment. The reasons I think it would be worth it are...."
- Notice that this approach involves taking ownership of self rather than trying to control the other person. You are owning what you think and what you would like rather than telling the other person what they should think or what they need to do.
- Notice that there are no accusatory or disrespectful statements, such as: "You're cheap! You don't care about me! No wonder people don't like you!"

**3. Respect Both Yourself and the Other Person as You Decide on Your Next Steps**

- The other person might disagree with you and might even handle the conversation poorly. The other person has agency over his/her own choices and actions. You are not in control of his view or his behavior, but you are in control of yours and of the decisions you make moving forward. Focus on your own next steps, not the other person's.

For more help building the skills of assertiveness into your life, visit [www.DrDawnMarie.com](http://www.DrDawnMarie.com).