

Resource 3: Assertive or aggressive?

(Extracted from Stress-free teaching, Russell Joseph, p108)

Many people confuse being assertive with being aggressive. They often see someone who stands up for their rights, someone who demands fairness and equality, as being aggressive. Being assertive means affirming or being positive in your approach. Aggressive means to attack and be on the offensive, often in an unprovoked incident.

This issue ties in with learning to say 'no'. It's important to consider what is reasonable and what is not, what is acceptable to you and what is not. Unassertive people frequently do not express irritation over the little things in life. They carry around a whole range of tormentors, appearing cool on the outside, until one day they blow up totally unexpectedly, over the slightest problem.

It's important to learn to communicate unhappiness, displeasure and frustration in a way that is acceptable socially. Assertive people speak from their own point of view, take responsibility for their feelings and try to help others understand why they are upset. On the other hand, aggressive people will say what they think, often in an abusive manner.

Aggressiveness and assertiveness can be compared as shown in the table below.

Aggressiveness	Assertiveness
Leads to feelings of embarrassment and guilt	Seldom followed by embarrassment and guilt
Often makes enemies and aggravates situations	Allows others to comprehend your point of view
Usually results in a negative outcome	Is more likely to achieve a positive outcome

Hint: Learn to be firm, not angry.