



assertiveness
confidence
& self-esteem

Not always there with you ...but always there for you

Assertiveness, confidence and self-esteem

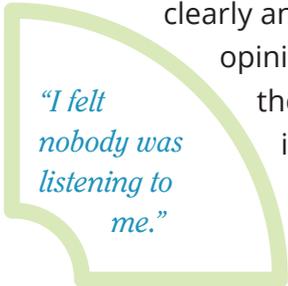
When you are caring for someone, it can be very difficult dealing with all of the professionals and new people in your life. You may find at times that is difficult for you and the person you are caring for to have your voices heard and to be listened to, and can lead to stress and frustration.

By developing assertiveness skills and improving confidence and self-esteem it can be easier to navigate through the systems and to have better outcomes both for you and the person you care for because you are at the centre of the decision making process.

However, if you have never needed these skills or if you have been caring for a while and feel that you may have lost some of the confidence and self-esteem you once had, this factsheet will help you to build, rediscover and hold onto these skills.

Assertiveness skills

Being assertive simply means being confident enough to clearly and effectively express your feelings, opinions and needs, while still valuing those of others. It's important because it impacts directly on the way that you communicate and interact with others and helps to improve self-esteem as you are more likely



*"I felt
nobody was
listening to
me."*

to feel respected and heard. It also gives you and the person you care for a better chance of getting what you really want.

What is assertive behaviour?

Assertiveness involves being clear about what you feel, what you need and how it can be achieved. This requires confident, open body language and the ability to communicate calmly without being confrontational.

Being assertive involves developing and working on the following skills:

- ▶ being able to say “yes” when you want to and “no” when you mean no, rather than feeling that you have to agree to something just to please someone else
- ▶ deciding on and sticking to clear boundaries and being confident to stand by your position even if others disagree
- ▶ understanding how to negotiate and compromise for preferred outcomes
- ▶ being able to talk openly about yourself and being able to listen to others
- ▶ being able to give and receive positive and negative feedback
- ▶ trying to have a positive, optimistic outlook

Learning to use these skills will help you to express your thoughts and feelings freely, speak up for yourself, know your rights, reason effectively and control your anger

Types of behaviour

When you engage with others in either a discussion or argument, there are several different ways in which you might behave and react to the situation.

These are known as passive, aggressive or assertive behaviours and it is important to know the difference in order to improve your assertiveness skills.



“I really thought about what I wanted to say and I wrote it down.”

Passive behaviour

If you try to avoid any form of conflict or feel that your views are of less importance and value than someone else's, you are being passive and this may lead you into situations or agreeing to things you may later regret.

Aggressive behaviour

As you would expect, this normally arises when you are feeling angry. You feel the need to get your own way, regardless of anyone else's thoughts or feelings and consequently, people stop listening to you and you stop listening to others. This can be very difficult to manage when you are feeling tired and frustrated.

Assertive behaviour

This is completely different to being passive or aggressive. It involves clear, calm thinking and respectful negotiation and discussion where everyone is entitled to their own opinion.

Lack of assertiveness can affect relationships both on a personal level but also when engaging with professionals such as GPs or Social and Health care. Passive and aggressive behaviours can lead to stress, anxiety and even depression and also impact on your physical well-being.

By learning to be more assertive, you can improve your communication and relationships with others, which in turn will lead to an improved quality of life for not only you, but also the person you are caring for.

How can you become more assertive?

How you communicate and your body language when you are communicating are both key to developing and improving assertiveness skills.

Body language

The way in which you hold yourself in discussion with others has an important impact on how they perceive you and consequently treat you. Assertive people generally stand upright, or sit straight but in a relaxed open manner and look people calmly in the eyes.

You can practice these skills with a friend or by standing in front of a mirror:

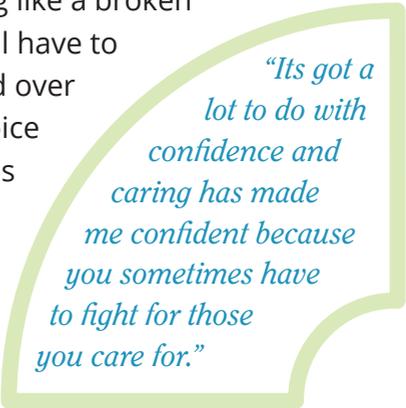
- ▶ face the other person or yourself and try to stay calm
- ▶ breathe steadily and evenly
- ▶ speak clearly and steadily – don't whisper or raise your voice
- ▶ show that you are listening by nodding appropriately
- ▶ keep your facial expression relaxed and open

Communication

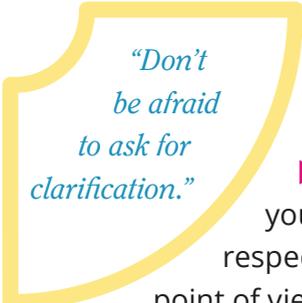
Once you have mastered the body language of assertiveness start to consider the way that you communicate with others. Clear communication is an important aspect of assertiveness.

Some hints and tips are listed below:

- ▶ try to express your feelings clearly. Try not to generalise your feelings by saying “you” in conversation, when you actually mean “I”. Recognise and acknowledge that you have choices so try saying “I could” and “I might” instead of “I must” and “I should”
- ▶ give yourself permission to say no. This is often difficult because you don’t want to feel that you are letting people down, be seen as unhelpful or unable to cope. You may feel that you have to do something because you find the other person intimidating but you are allowed to say no. Keep the conversation polite, clear and simple and don’t feel that you have to apologise for saying no to something
- ▶ don’t be afraid of sounding like a broken record. Sometimes you will have to repeat your point over and over again in a calm but firm voice until what you are saying is clear to the other person. This can be particularly useful if you are speaking to someone who you feel just isn’t listening



“Its got a lot to do with confidence and caring has made me confident because you sometimes have to fight for those you care for.”



*“Don’t
be afraid
to ask for
clarification.”*

to what you have to say or if you feel that you are being manipulated into a situation

- ▶ remember to listen to the person you are talking to, treat them with respect and courtesy and try to see their point of view, even if you disagree
- ▶ accept that conversation and discussions don’t always go to plan – don’t be afraid to suggest having the conversation at a different time if emotions are running high or agree to disagree so that you can move on. Learn from the experience.
- ▶ Practice makes perfect but like any new skill, it will take time. Take the time to prepare before having difficult conversations whatever the situations and to have a check list in your head and you are more likely to succeed.

Building confidence and self-esteem

At some point in our lives most of us will experience feelings of uncertainty, lack self-confidence and have doubts about our abilities. This is normal, however when you are caring for something these feelings can feel more profound and may be connected to loss of income and lifestyle, having to give up work and leisure pursuits and feelings of isolation.

Confidence and self-esteem can be lost as caring takes over and fatigue and low mood set in and building it up again can be difficult but it can be done!

First, it is important to understand what self-esteem and self-confidence mean:

- ▶ Self-esteem refers to the way that you think and feel and value yourself as a person
- ▶ Self-confidence refers to how able you feel to get a task done – your abilities
- ▶ Low self-esteem is feeling negative about yourself on a regular basis

Not everyone is born with an in-built sense of self-confidence and self-esteem and many of us have to work at it. There may be periods in your life when you feel more confident than at others and this is to be expected. Sometimes it can be really challenging to develop confidence and self-esteem when you are a naturally shy and introverted person or when you have experienced something in your personal life, which has had a negative impact.

There are a few things though that you can do to start you on your way to improving your confidence and self-esteem. Some of these are small changes like looking at your frame of mind and being honest with yourself and there are other things that will take longer and for which you may need support.

Detailed overleaf are five tips for building self confidence and self-esteem, make a list of them and put them somewhere where you can easily see them to help you to focus and identify the areas that you need to concentrate on.

1. Look at what you've already achieved

Sometimes it can be too easy to focus on what you haven't done. It is easy to lose confidence if you feel that you haven't managed to achieve anything and if you feel that your life is now on hold because of your caring situation. Focus on things you have done, tasks you've completed, things that you are proud of – it can be anything, big or small, but acknowledge that these are your successes and they will help you to recognise your individual talents and abilities.

Make a list of all the things you have done in your life that have made you feel proud – think of the positive things you have achieved – whether it's an academic achievement, riding a bike or meeting the needs of the person you are caring for, as well as your own. Keep this list close and add to it the next time you do something you are proud of.

When you are feeling low look at your list and use it to remind you of everything that you have done and achieved in life.

2. Think of things you're good at

We all have strengths and talents – think about yours. Think about your day and everything you do for the person you are caring for – it might be managing finances and budgeting, supporting them to lead a full life or simply juggling many balls in the air – these are all accomplishments and strengths.

Recognise what you are good at – trying to build on these things can really be a valuable way off building confidence in your abilities and sharing your knowledge and expertise with others in similar situations can really help you to feel valued.

3. Set some goals

Set some personal goals and aim to achieve them. By proving to yourself that you can get things done, you'll prove to yourself what you're capable of achieving. They don't have to be big goals, they can be things like baking a cake, or taking some time for yourself, even taking time out of your busy life of caring for others to have a long soak in the bath. Its little things that can be ticked off a list and help you gain self-confidence in achieving an accomplishing things that you have set out to do.

4. Talk yourself up

Positive thinking is very powerful – you are never going to feel confident if you have negative thoughts running through your head telling you that you are no good. Look at the language you use and focus on the things you have done well, however small, rather than those you haven't. Turn your failures to success by learning from them and moving on.

5. Get a hobby

When you are caring for someone, it can be very difficult to find time for yourself but there is help out there in the form of respite to allow you to have some time out.

If you are able to have some time to yourself it might be worth thinking about taking up a hobby – this could be something new or something that you used to do, but try to find something that you are really passionate about. Think about what you are interested in and if possible try to commit yourself to giving it a go. Finding stuff you are passionate about will help you find stuff that you are good at.

The Borders Carers Centre can help you source funding and access time out if needed to enjoy your pastime, whether it's taking up painting, joining a social club or simply going for a walk.

If none of this helps

Sometimes the quick fixes are not enough and if you are worried about your low confidence and self-esteem don't be afraid of seeking informal or professional help. It might be worth talking to someone who knows you well and is good at building you up and helping you to feel better about yourself.

You can also speak to your GP about a referral to a counsellor or psychologist who have some really good strategies that can help to build up your confidence and self-esteem and at the same time address any underlying problems that might be impacting on you.

Check with Borders Carers Centre for free workshops on assertiveness and confidence building.

Notes...

*“Always
remember
you matter
too.”*

Notes...





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