

## Four steps to being more assertive

4 steps to being more assertive 45 year old Judy revealed in an anger management class that she was constantly angry at her husband. When asked why, she revealed that her aged mother lives next door and she always felt conflicted whether to spend time with her husband or her mother after work. She loved them both, but resented her husband's becoming demanding and upset when she spent needed time with her mother instead of being with him. Judy revealed that she dealt with the situation by ignoring her husband when he expressed displeasure - with disastrous results. These included constant bickering and tension in the home as well as emotional distance from each other. How much better the outcome would have been had Judy used basic skills of assertive communication. What is assertive communication? It is a way to communicate to your family your rights, feelings and needs - but in a good way. It is a method of letting family members know where you stand on things and what your limits and boundaries are. Assertive communication allows you to clarify communication and stand up for yourself without making things worse or getting a negative result or response from your loved ones. Four Steps to Assertive Communication: Step 1 - Send clear messages Turns out Judy had never clearly told her husband how she felt when he put pressure on her to spend time with him instead of her mother. When she did discuss it, she hemmed, hawed and stammered with almost no eye contact. As a result her husband was not getting a clear message. To communicate clearly, look at your posture and your facial expressions, as well as your hand and arm movements. Pay special attention to your tone of voice which can say volumes beyond your words. Step 2 - Learn how to listen Assertive people have developed their listening skills. While hearing is done with your ears, true listening is done with your heart. To be a better communicator, start by becoming a better listener. Step 3 - Start the conversation with "I feel" rather than "you should." Words have tremendous power to determine how other people experience us, and how they respond to an issue. For this reason, people with good assertive communication skills focus on the problem behavior (and not the character of the person), stick to the point, don't use labels, and make "I" statements rather than "you" statements. Judy tried this with her husband and it worked very well. Here is what she said: "Honey, I love you and want to be with you, but I also need to be with my mother now. Could you get along without me for an hour a night? I'll try to always be back by 8:30 PM." Step 4 - Acknowledge your part in the conflict or issue

Anger is often an escalating process, involving two people who create a negative feeling in each other, sometimes instantly and sometimes over a long period of time. It is natural to blame another family member entirely for the problem, especially when we are angry or in a defensive mode. But, once we return to normal, the assertive communicator is able to accept some of the responsibility for the conflict. This acceptance and acknowledgement of your contribution to the problem is an indication of emotional maturity and can create an entirely different atmosphere between conflicting family members. Try saying the following things to promote communication: - My reactions were too extreme. I'm sorry. - Even though I still feel I was right about the issue, my reaction wasn't right and I apologize. - I never thought of things that way. - Let me start again in a different way. - I can see my part in all this. To Judy's delight, when she practiced saying some of these things to her husband in a loving way, he began changing too. Almost immediately, he became less demanding, more understanding, and more aligned with her so both of them could better care for her aging mother.

## About the Author

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