

3 STEPS TO BEING MORE ASSERTIVE IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP

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*Ahh, the kids are in bed and you've just settled into your favorite spot on the couch for a Netflix session with your spouse. Now, what to watch? You scroll through the options, waiting for your partner to suggest something. A few things grab your interest, but you don't say anything. Your partner finally calls out an option. You're not crazy about the choice, but you start it anyway. Then for the next 90 minutes you sit silently wishing you'd picked something **you** wanted to watch.*

This is a trivial example, but it's a microcosm of the role of assertiveness in relationships. In good communication, assertiveness is the flip side of active listening. It's being self-aware enough to *know what we want and need*, and then *communicating* that to our partner in an honest, respectful way. It gives your partner a fair shot at meeting your needs and wishes while you're being accountable for your own happiness.

For some people, assertiveness comes easily. You're confident and comfortable asking for what you want; you don't take it personally if you don't always get it. For others, being assertive is a struggle, and it can build upon itself. You don't voice your needs, so you don't get them. You feel a lack of agency over your situation, causing you to feel even less confident. It's a tough cycle to break, but not impossible. Here how you can begin being more assertive in your relationship:

1. Start small.

There are lots of small choices you can make to get more comfortable with speaking up about what you want. Next time you're trying to decide what to do for dinner, choose takeout from your favorite restaurant without hesitation. What will you do this weekend? Tell your spouse your ideal plans. You might be surprised by their reaction, or by how heartened you feel in making your ideal become reality.

2. Share a wish.

Think of something you'd like more or less of in your relationship, then share it with your partner. Focus on using **"I" statements** and share how you'd feel if your wish came true. It might sound something like, *"I wish we spent less time on our phones when we're together. I'd feel so much more connected to you."*

3. Speak up when you normally wouldn't.

Once you're more comfortable speaking up about smaller needs, and wishes, you'll feel more confident to bring up heftier issues. Pay attention to situations where you find yourself annoyed or resentful. Your natural response might be to push those feelings aside and say, *"Okay, that's fine."* Instead, challenge yourself to voice *your* feelings. Keep in mind you might/should not always get your way. That's okay. Being assertive gives them the opportunity to meet you halfway.

Becoming more assertive in your relationship won't happen overnight. Small changes can have a compounding effect: as your assertiveness increases, your self-confidence increases, which promotes continued assertiveness, and so on. As a component of good communication, it's a skill that will pay dividends in all areas of your relationship