

PRINCIPALS' DIGESTS

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Newsletter

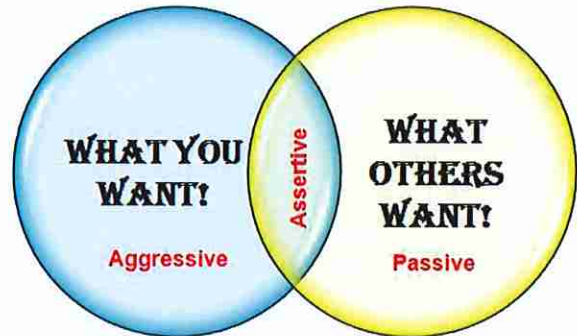
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ASSERTIVENESS TIPS FOR STUDENTS

Assertiveness is the sweet spot between two extremes:

- **Aggressive** – Prioritising your own needs; using threats or violence to get your way;
- **Passive** – Doing things you don't want to do because of pressure or threats;
- **Assertive** – Standing up for yourself without diminishing others; strong, not mean.

Assertive communication is a hard skill to learn. Our culture sometimes tends to reward aggression. Putdowns are framed as humour in cartoons and sitcoms, and the Internet can be a platform for bullying. It's hard to find examples of assertiveness in the public sphere. That's why teachers and parents need to explicitly teach assertiveness so students internalise skills and use them in everyday situations.



Some techniques:

The “nice no” – When a student feels pressured to go along with other people's ideas or invitations (“Do you want to trade lunches?”), it can be effective to say, “No, thanks” or “Thanks for asking, but not today”.

Setting a boundary and holding to it – When asked to do something outside your comfort zone (“Can I copy off your paper?”), it's effective to say, “No, I'm not comfortable with that” and not feel compelled to give reasons.

Asking for some thinking time – When asked for something and you're not ready to answer, an assertive response is to say, “I'm not sure how to answer that right now. Can I get back to you later today?” Ask for the amount of time you need to get more information, weigh other options, and reflect on your feelings about the situation.

Stating your needs – It may seem that others are ignoring or disrespecting your needs when the problem is that you actually haven't articulated them clearly enough. For example, a student might say to a teacher, “Could you please repeat that? I need to hear the directions again”.

Using an “I feel” message – This may be the best way to communicate your feelings and emotional needs so others have a chance to understand – for example, saying to a friend, “I feel sad when you cancel our plans, because I love hanging out with you”.

Responding to aggression – Sometimes an assertive statement is met with an aggressive response. A good next step is to calmly remove yourself from the conversation, saying, “I think I communicated my thoughts clearly, so there's not much more to talk about”.

Acknowledgment: “Modeling Assertiveness with Students” by Kristin Stuart Valdes in *Edutopia*, January 25, 2018