



Assertive Communication

Clear, respectful words for needs, limits, feelings, and choices.

Assertive does not mean harsh

Assertiveness respects your needs and the other person's dignity. You may be calm and firm. You do not need to over-explain, debate, or earn permission to have a boundary.

Three common styles

Passive	My needs disappear. I may agree when I mean no.	"Whatever you want is fine."
Aggressive	My needs are expressed through force, blame, threats, or disrespect.	"Do it now. You never listen."
Assertive	I state what I feel, need, will do, or will not do while respecting dignity.	"I am not available tonight."

A simple sentence frame

Try this

When... name the specific situation. **I feel...** name your experience. **I need...** state the need or limit.
Would you be willing to... make a clear request.

Example: "When plans change without notice, I feel overwhelmed. I need more time to adjust. Would you be willing to text me when the plan changes?"

Not every sentence needs all four parts. A complete boundary can be: **"No, I am not available."**



Sentences to Try

Choose words that fit the setting and your level of safety.

Goal	Words to try	When it may help
Say no	"No, I cannot do that." / "That does not work for me."	When a request exceeds your time, energy, values, or safety.
Ask for time	"I need time to think. I will answer tomorrow."	When you feel pressured or need to check your capacity.
Set a limit	"I can talk for ten minutes, then I need to stop."	When you can offer something, but not unlimited access.
Request change	"Please speak to me without insults. If that continues, I will end the conversation."	When naming both a request and what you will do.
Clarify	"I want to make sure I understood. Are you asking me to...?"	When the request or expectation is unclear.
Disagree	"I see this differently." / "I am not agreeing to that."	When you want to stay respectful without pretending to agree.
Ask for support	"Could you listen without giving advice for five minutes?"	When you know what kind of support would help.
Repair	"I spoke sharply earlier. I am sorry. I want to try that conversation again."	When you want accountability without attacking yourself.
Pause	"I am becoming overloaded. I need a break. I can return at 3:00."	When your body or mind needs lower demand.
Work or school	"I can complete A by Friday. If B is also urgent, which should come first?"	When priorities exceed the time available.



My Capacity Meter

Capacity can change across a day. Check before you commit.

5 - OPEN	I have room for planned tasks and perhaps something extra.	<i>"I can help. Let us decide what is needed."</i>
4 - STEADY	I can handle usual needs if I protect time and pacing.	<i>"I can do this by Thursday."</i>
3 - LIMITED	I can do a small or clearly defined amount.	<i>"I can help for 15 minutes."</i>
2 - VERY LOW	Essentials only. I need fewer demands and more time.	<i>"I cannot answer now. I need more time."</i>
1 - EMPTY	Rest, safety, food, hydration, or support comes first.	<i>"I cannot take this on."</i>

Capacity is information

Low capacity is not laziness, weakness, or failure. It may reflect stress, grief, pain, illness, sensory load, caregiving, trauma responses, poor sleep, or too many demands. Match the request to the capacity you actually have.

My capacity right now is: 1 2 3 4 5

What is using my capacity today?

What can I reduce, delay, delegate, or decline?

The sentence I want to use is:



Practice Before the Conversation

You can write it, say it aloud, or send it in a message when that is appropriate and safe.

What happened? Use specific facts rather than labels.

What did I feel or notice in my body?

What do I need, prefer, or choose?

What am I asking the other person to do?

What will I do if the limit is not respected?

My final sentence:

Say less if needed

A boundary is about your action: "If yelling begins, I will leave the room." You do not have to make the other person agree before you protect your time, energy, or safety.



My Trust Circles

Trust can grow slowly. Access does not have to be all-or-nothing.

CENTER - ME	My needs, values, privacy, body, time, and choices.
INNER CIRCLE	People who are consistent, respectful, accountable, and safe with vulnerability.
GROWING TRUST	People I am getting to know through small, lower-risk steps.
LIMITED ACCESS	People I may interact with while keeping firm topics, time, or contact limits.
PROFESSIONAL OR PUBLIC	People who receive only information needed for the role or setting.

A person may move closer when they consistently:

- respect “no” and do not punish boundaries
- keep private information private
- show care without controlling
- take responsibility and repair harm
- allow differences and mutual choice

One person whose trust level I want to consider:

One small, lower-risk way I could learn more about their reliability:



Safety Comes Before Assertiveness

Direct communication is a tool, not a requirement.

Important

If someone has threatened, abused, stalked, intimidated, monitored, or retaliated against you, direct confrontation may increase risk. You may choose distance, documentation, blocked contact, an advocate, legal advice, or a safety plan instead.

Before a difficult conversation, I can ask:

- Do I feel physically and emotionally safe enough?
- Has this person respected limits before?
- Could they retaliate, follow, monitor, threaten, or punish me?
- Would written communication, a witness, or a public setting be safer?
- Would no response be the safer response?
- Do I want help from an advocate, supervisor, clinician, attorney, or trusted person?

My safer option may be:

People or services I can contact for support:

Remember

You are allowed to protect yourself. Silence, distance, or asking for help can be an assertive choice when direct engagement is unsafe.