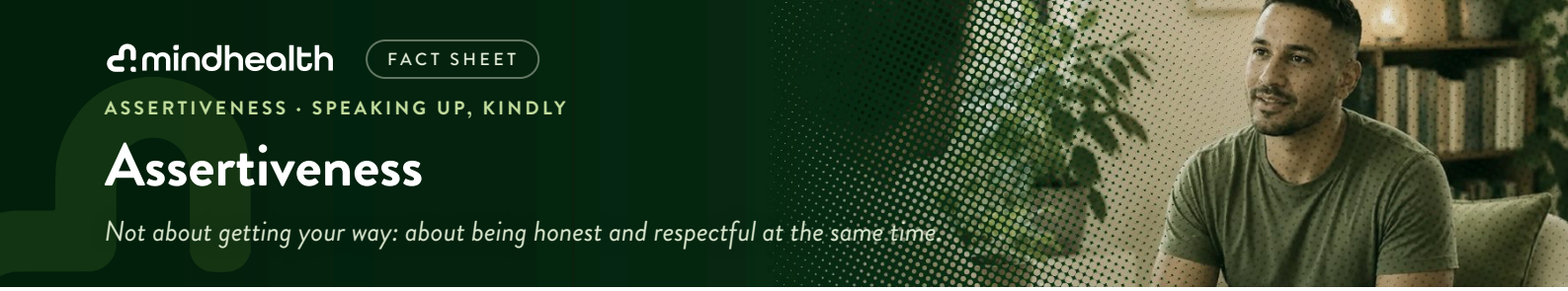
mindhealth FACT SHEET

ASSERTIVENESS · SPEAKING UP, KINDLY

Assertiveness

Not about getting your way: about being honest and respectful at the same time.



Your voice
Saying what you actually think

Your boundaries
A "no" that actually holds

Both count
Your needs and theirs

01 The three styles

Most of us drift into passive (put others first, swallow our needs), aggressive (put ourselves first, run over others), or passive-aggressive (say yes, then seethe). Assertiveness is the balance point: expressing your needs, views and limits clearly and respectfully, while still valuing the other person. It's a skill, not a personality, which means it can be learned.

02 Why it feels hard

If you learned early that speaking up wasn't safe or wasn't your place, being assertive can feel selfish or risky. But bottling things up breeds resentment and quiet burnout, and it teaches people where your limits aren't. Said kindly and early, a clear "no" or a direct request usually lands far better than we fear, and protects the relationship rather than threatening it.

03 What genuinely helps

- The "I feel… when… I'd like…" format
- Buying time: "let me get back to you"
- Starting small, with lower-stakes requests
- Letting a "no" be a full sentence
- Separating being liked from being respected

A PRACTICAL STORY

From an automatic "yes" to a clear, kind "no"



THE BALANCE

Passive to aggressive



Assertiveness is the middle ground: your needs and theirs both count. Both ends cost you.

PRACTICAL TOOLKIT

Say it simply

1. Name it: "I feel…"
2. Ask for one clear thing
3. Let "no" stand without a long excuse

Clear and kind can coexist.

WHEN TO SEEK HELP

If speaking up feels impossible, or resentment is building, a psychologist can help you build the skill. Ask your GP about a Mental Health Treatment Plan for Medicare rebates.

DID YOU KNOW?

Assertiveness training grew out of early behaviour therapy. Andrew Salter's 1949 book Conditioned Reflex Therapy is often named as its starting point.

Salter, Conditioned Reflex Therapy, 1949

THE KEY TAKEAWAY

Being assertive isn't putting yourself first: it's letting yourself count too.

Need support right now? Lifeline **13 11 14** · Emergency **000** — available 24/7. More options: **mindhealth.com.au/urgent-help**

TALK TO US WHEN YOU'RE READY

Parramatta and online, Australia-wide · **Book at mindhealth.com.au**

1300 084 200

MH-CR-219 · v32 · October 2026
© 2026 Mind Health · General information, not medical advice · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0