
ASSERTIVENESS

When children have the upper hand in the relationship with their parents, part of the problem may be to do with assertiveness.

From the outset, children need to know who is in charge. That is easier for those of us who have developed the skills and confidence to be assertive. You might be assertive in work, but not with the children. Being assertive makes communication more open and honest. It also helps others to know what you are thinking when it comes to negotiation or compromise.

Assertiveness is about knowing what you want, believing it is fair, asking for it clearly, talking openly about your feelings, and remaining calm.

Parents who are feeling undermined, and that their authority counts for very little, may need to look at the manner in which they give instructions or talk about issues to their children. Pleading for something to be done, or excusing a viewpoint, comes across as weak and, as a result, may be disregarded.

If we, as parents, want to be in control, then we have to convey this in a clear and forthright manner - always avoiding crossing the line by becoming aggressive.

Q:

I am a mother who, two years ago, left a very abusive relationship and am trying to rebuild my life. My children are quite young (four and six), but I can see that they take advantage of me when they can. What can I do?

A:

It sounds as if you have been having a very rough time. It is good that you, as their mother, recognise the need for the children to give you the respect they should.

To make sustained changes, it would be more useful for you to come in to Parents Advice Centre and discuss the matter in detail. In the meantime, consider what you want from the children, keep it simple, and try telling them this clearly in a firm, but calm, tone.

It is very important that you are clear what you want from them. Concentrate on one thing first - like your tone of voice - making sure you are assertive, but not frightening. You will know if you have got it right by their response.

