

# Assertiveness in Caregiving: Is This Possible?

by Lynn Butler

If you are a family or friend caregiver, how can you be assertive without being aggressive? How do you handle things if the person to whom you give care is rude to you? What if the person you give care to is aggressive, mean, or just takes you for granted? Should you stand up for yourself or just continue to accept the bad behaviour?

This is a very perplexing place to be. If you had a loved one who was doing what you do (giving care) and they told you they were being subjected to unacceptable and hurtful behaviour, what would you tell them to do?

Let's take a look first at what being assertive means and then at ways we can be more assertive in our everyday caregiving role.

Here is one definition of assertiveness from [SkillsYouNeed.com](https://www.skillsyouneed.com). "Assertiveness is the ability to stand up for yourself and your rights, while also protecting the rights and opinions of others." Being assertive in a pos-



itive way can help a person maintain their own identity while at the same time helping your relationships thrive.

Wouldn't it be great to be able to express yourself without becoming upset or upsetting others? Here are some ways, suggested by [SkillsYouNeed.com](https://www.skillsyouneed.com), that you can use assertiveness in your relationships to help manage potentially unacceptable or disagreeable encounters.

Talk openly and honestly about your feelings. Don't let negative thoughts or feelings stay bottled up. The sooner you start opening up and expressing yourself, putting a name to your feelings (sad, hurt, angry, afraid etc.) when they arise, the easier this gets.

Listen intently, doing your best to understand what your loved one, the care recipient, is really telling you. Repeat what you hear and make sure it is what is being said. Try to listen without judgement. Just listen to understand what your person is trying to communicate.

Be grateful when something is done for you, no matter how small. Saying please and thank-you goes a long way and, hopefully, this will become a pattern that gets reciprocated. If you have been taken for granted, you know how badly that makes you feel. Do the opposite. Show by example.

Admit when a mistake is yours and give an apology. This is not easy to do especially if communication is difficult, but an apology can clear the air immediately when given in earnest. This one might be difficult for your care recipient to demonstrate, but over time it may become the new norm.

Share responsibilities when possible. You are both in this together. When possible ask for your loved one's input and opinions. Everyone needs and wants to feel like they have a purpose and that they matter, so treat your person as equal.

Being more assertive is not about being more aggressive. It's about standing up for yourself in the effort to make your relationships better. It's all about respect in the end.