

Potential Adverse Reactions

In our experience with facilitating assertiveness in others we have found that negative results occur in a minimal number of instances. Certain people do, however, react in a disagreeable manner when they face assertion from another. Therefore, even if the assertion is handled properly, neither being non-assertive or aggressive to any degree, one may at times still be faced with uncomfortable situations such as the following:

1. Backbiting – After you have asserted yourself, the other person involved may be somewhat disgruntled, but not openly. For example, if you see others in line jumping ahead of you and you assert yourself, the person may grumble as he passes you to go to the end of the line. You may hear such things as “Who does he think he is anyway?”, “Big deal!”, “Big man!”, and so forth. To our way of thinking, the best solution is simply to ignore the childish behavior. If you do retort in some manner, you are likely only to complicate the situation by reinforcing the fact that his words “got to you”.
2. Aggression – In this case the other party may become outwardly hostile toward you. Yelling or screaming could be involved or physical reactions like bumping, shoving, or hitting. Again, the best approach is to avoid escalating the condition. You may choose to express regret that he is upset by your actions, but you must remain steadfast in your assertion. This is especially true if you will have further contacts with him. If you back down on your assertion, you will simply reinforce his negative reaction. As a result, the next time you assert yourself with him, the probability will be high that you will receive another aggressive reaction.
3. Temper Tantrums – In certain situations you may assert yourself with someone who has had his own way for a long period of time. He may then react to your assertion by looking hurt, saying his health is precarious, saying you don't like him, crying and feeling sorry for himself or otherwise attempting to control you by making you feel guilty.
4. Psychosomatic Reactions – Actual physical illness may occur in some individuals if you thwart a long-established habit. Abdominal pain, headaches, and feeling faint are just a few of the symptoms possible. To reiterate, however, one should choose to be firm in the assertion, recognizing that the other person will adjust to the new situation in a short time. You should also be consistent in your assertion whenever the same situation recurs with this individual. If you're inconsistent in asserting your rights the other person involved will become confused. He or she may eventually just ignore your assertions.
5. Over Apologizing – On rare occasions after you have asserted yourself the other party involved will be overly apologetic or overly humble to you. You should point out to him that such behavior is unnecessary. If, in later encounters with him, he seems to be afraid of you or overly deferent toward you, you should not take advantage of him. We feel that you could help him to develop assertiveness for himself, utilizing the methods we have described.
6. Revenge – If you have a continuing relationship with the person to whom you have asserted yourself, there is the chance that he may seek revenge. At first it might be difficult to understand what he is attempting to do, but as time goes on his taunts will become quite evident. Once you are certain that he is trying to make your life miserable, you should squelch his actions immediately. A recommended method is to take him aside and confront him directly with the situation. Usually this is enough to get him to cease his vengeful tactics.