

I would like you to remember a time when you managed to deal with a difficult (caregiving) situation more easily than usual. It could have been a week ago or perhaps even years ago. Believe it or not, you were probably respecting your boundaries and those of the other person while standing up for yourself and saying or doing what you believed was needed. That is an example of assertiveness and doing it well.

So, let's break down assertiveness and how to do it well into its 3 parts: boundaries, goal, and voice. I predict that you've never have heard assertiveness being talked about this way before. Given my experience as a counsellor, this seems to describe the process of becoming assertive quite well. We'll take it part by part and I think you'll find it quite manageable if not delightful to become more assertive.

**Boundaries** remind you to figure out whose issue this belongs to, in other words, is it yours? Really, I want you think about this. Too often people run into trouble simply because they get into other people's situations where they are not wanted nor requested to be. As I wrote in the boundaries article: Everyone has boundaries: you, the person for whom you are caring, and other health care providers. However our world is larger than just our role as caregivers, so it helps to remind ourselves that we all have boundaries which separate us from each other (our family, our friends, our acquaintances, strangers...). In other words we each have our own agenda and perspectives on the world around us and ourselves. Boundaries separate us in many ways: physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. In effect, our boundaries are our limits which house our unique values and our integrity. So, may I suggest writing down some issues in which you are feeling uncomfortable. Spend a bit of time here to actually determine if any of these issues are really yours. If they aren't, please take care of yourself as you are witnessing someone doing something that you don't like; this is hard, so focus on self-care and reminding yourself that it's their choice (if it were your issue, you would do it differently). If they are your issues, simply proceed.

**Goal** reminds you to think about what you want to achieve. What do you think would be the best given the circumstances? Again, I suggest writing it down. Then, break down the goal even further into mini-goals. These mini-goals have several benefits: it keeps you on track; the overall big goal is broken down into small manageable bits; and you can glean more satisfactory moments. Now this last benefit is important so please don't just dismiss it as I predict some of you might do simply out of habit. To be able to become assertive and live your life more easily it is important to incorporate more moments of joy and more moments of satisfaction. Also remember that assertiveness is in all relationships, including the one you are having with yourself (sometimes people use the term "willpower" to describe this situation!). So, start fine-tuning your goals.

**Voice** is the most delightful word to describe your ability to express yourself to yourself and to others. The quality of your ability to express yourself predictably relies upon your sense of self and sense of direction. So, if you are clear that this is your issue and you are clear about your goal, your voice will naturally follow. Practice never hurts by the way; it only improves your feeling of comfort and your finesse. In other words, you are being assertive and doing it well!