

Insecure, Assertive and Aggressive Responses to Unwelcome Approaches

Being assertive means respecting your own rights. Insecurity comes from an unhealthy focus on the other person or a denial of yourself. As a result, an insecure response benefits the person intruding on your privacy and fails to protect you.

At the other end of the spectrum it is possible to confuse assertiveness and aggression. This is a very important distinction to make for two reasons: First, if you would be uncomfortable with aggressive behavior, you might well be able to act assertively if you were familiar with the difference.

Second, aggression can escalate a conflict, while the aim of assertiveness is to de-escalate it. There are times when you might choose to be aggressive, but you must be prepared to respond at the new, higher level of tension which can be created.

The following is a brief comparison of insecure, assertive, and aggressive responses to typical situations which make these distinctions clear.

| Unwelcome Approach | | |
|---|--|--|
| <i>“Why are you being so unfriendly? Don’t you like me, honey?”</i> | | |
| <u>Insecure Response</u> | <u>Aggressive Response</u> | <u>Assertive Response</u> |
| “Oh, no, it’s not that ... I don’t want you to think that. I’m just in a hurry, sorry.” | “Is there any reason why I should, creep?” | “Leave me alone. I don’t want to talk to you.” |

| Unwelcome Approach | | |
|---|---|---|
| <i>“I have an appointment with your neighbor but he’s not here. Would you mind if I come in and use your phone?”</i> | | |
| <u>Insecure Response</u> | <u>Aggressive Response</u> | <u>Assertive Response</u> |
| “Well, I don’t know ... I guess it’s okay.” | “Get lost. I’ve got better things to do than be bothered by you.” | “It’s a shame you’ve wasted your time, but it’s really not my responsibility. I’m busy right now. Goodbye.” |

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| <p>Unwelcome Approach</p> <p><i>“Come on, let me drive you home.”</i></p> | | |
| <p><u>Insecure Response</u></p> <p>“Well, I had planned to walk ... but I guess I shouldn’t refuse such a nice offer.”</p> | <p><u>Aggressive Response</u></p> <p>“Get out of my way. I can manage on my own.”</p> | <p><u>Assertive Response</u></p> <p>“No, thank you. I would prefer to walk.”</p> |

These three types of response are also apparent in your body language. With insecurity, you might shrink backwards or allow someone to crowd you. With aggression, you might move threateningly toward the other person, perhaps gesturing in his face.

The assertive position is to hold your ground in a posture that expresses strength and determination. You can practice feeling rooted in the earth and taking deep breaths that expand your sense of the space you fill. It is much easier to be assertive when body language and speech (or non-verbal communication) are working together to convey your message.

– Excerpted from *Women’s Self-Defense: A Complete Guide to Assault Prevention*, Los Angeles Commission on Assaults Against Women, 1987, 213.955.9090, 213.955.9095 (TDD) and <http://www.lacaaw.org/>.

Produced and distributed by:

