

## 19. Being Assertive

Parents have needs too. If you neglect these parts of your life to put all your energy into parenting, your parenting will suffer as well. If you keep giving out but don't take anything in to replenish your spirit, it's so easy to dry up. If you keep trying to meet increasing demands from everyone, you will end up exhausted. If you are worn out or stressed out, you can't give quality time to your children. Your life, and their lives, will all be so much the poorer. You have to **look after yourself to look after your children.** (*See Tip 1 - Look After Yourself to Look after Your Children*)

You need to be able to communicate your needs to other people - to your partner, your children, your friends and other people so they don't take advantage of you and leave you feeling used and abused, but you need to do it politely and considerately. Gentle assertiveness is based on self confidence and respect for others.

Three simple strategies are:

1. "I" messages. "I" messages:

- distinguish between the other person and their action, and so
- don't criticise the other person the way "you" messages do.

To use an "I" message, state:

- what the other person's action is,
- what its effect on you is,
- why it has that effect, and
- what you would like to happen instead:

e.g. (to a pushy neighbour): "When you ask me to drop everything to do something for you, it puts me in a big muddle because I already have a very full day and I don't get everything done that I need to do for my family. If you want me to do something for you, can you please give me warning so I can plan ahead?"

2. "Broken record" strategy. If someone is making demands on you, just keep repeating your point of view:

e.g. (to the same neighbour) "Yes, I know you need someone to mind your children, but I have to go to the bank and then go shopping today or else we'll have nothing for dinner tonight, so I'm sorry but I can't do it."

3. Win-win strategy. This means finding solutions acceptable to you and the other person – child or adult. It is like problem solving when it's your problem (see [Problem Solving](#)). (**See Tip 18 - Problem Solving**)

To talk to your child about an issue, state the problem using an “I” message, then go through the steps of problem solving, helping your child develop problem solving skills:

- State your “I” message
- “What can you do about it?” (Think about options)
- “What will happen if you do that? Is that what you want?” (Explore options)
- “What is the best thing to do?” (Decide on a plan of action)
- “That was good problem solving.” (Praise and encourage problem solving)
- “How is it going?” (Evaluate – and repeat process if necessary)

When going on from the “I” message to problem solving with adults, you may not have to help them through each individual step of the procedure. (The steps are there to teach problem solving to children.) Be willing to explore other options the other person suggests to find win-win solutions to the problem.