



# How to be assertive to get the support that you need

## **brainstrust information sheet**

Know Hows are published by *brainstrust* to help people living with a brain tumour to understand current topics. They are produced with input from relevant scientific and clinical experts and are written in a way that should help you to understand often complicated topics.

If you have an idea for a Know How, then please let us know.

If you have any queries, don't forget you can talk to one of our support specialists on **01983 292 405**, or email **hello@brainstrust.org.uk**.

### **Why do we need this Know How?**

Assertiveness is often needed to make sure you get the support you need when living with a brain tumour diagnosis. Being assertive, when done well, can be transformative. Not just for the person being assertive but also for the person they are being assertive with. It can bring clarity to a confusing situation, progress a situation that is stuck and bring a sense of equality to a conversation.

Assertiveness is about being honest and direct while standing your ground and respecting the other person's opinions.

Assertiveness is not being passive (giving in to others, avoiding the issue), nor is it being aggressive (being blunt, rude, threatening). It is not being passive-aggressive, where emotions are used to meet a need.

### **What does this mean?**

Everyone has rights. Whether you are a patient or a caregiver, you have a right to ask for things. If you are doing a substantial, regular amount of care, you have a right to ask for a carer's assessment, and the person you are caring for has a right to a needs assessment. You will have employment rights and rights in other areas, such as education, race, religion. Being assertive means having a mature, honest, direct discussion. It means being able to park the emotion you might be feeling at a time when people are in a heightened emotional state through being stressed, fearful, angry or feeling guilt. It's not easy.

## How can I be assertive without being passive, aggressive or passive-aggressive?

### Be aware of your own role

- You have a right to change your mind, to make mistakes, to ask for what you want, to ask for clarity if you don't understand something.
- Remember, people need you to keep on caring. Use this to get your voice heard.
- You are an equal in this – nobody knows the person you are caring for more than you do.
- Don't take on other people's problems – you are not responsible for these.
- Don't seek approval. You don't need it.

### Engage your audience

- Information is power. Stick to these facts – what you know to be true.
- Love the man; hate the sin. Try to depersonalise the situation.
- State calmly how the situation is making you feel.
- Give the worst-day scenario. Don't underplay what you are dealing with.

### Know what you need

- What's your bottom line? What's the position that you won't move from? If you know this, it helps achieve the outcome that you want/need.
- Focus on what it is you need. What does the other person need to hear? There are some things you can do to give yourself the best chance. Be firm in your request – instead of saying, 'I can't do this any more,' say, 'I'm exhausted and need a rest.' Or say, 'I would like to speak to you about some respite care' rather than, 'I was wondering if I could have a break.' Say how the situation is making you feel.

### Use language assertively

- Say no or yes – don't be vague.
- Slow down, lower your voice, and speak simply and clearly.
- Plan what you want to say. Conversations work better if they are planned and rehearsed (even if it is just in your own head). You don't need to plan it word for word, just the key points you'd like to get across. Make sure you have a full understanding of the situation from your perspective. It might also help to try and see it from the other person's point of view. You can't plan much more than that. Remember that you have very little control over how the person you're talking to will respond. Do your best and believe it will help. More information about how to have a successful conversation can be found in our ['How to have a difficult conversation'](#) resource.

### Ask yourself

- What specifically am I struggling with?
- What do I need to be different?
- What do I want for the other person?
- What do I want for myself?
- What does a good result look like?
- When's the right time to talk?
- What are the reasons to hold the conversation? And to not?
- What can go wrong?
- What do I sense?
- What do I know?

## Contact

Talk to *brainstrust*. We can help. You can call, write, type, text. Email for help and support: **hello@brainstrust.org.uk**.  
Telephone: **01983 292 405**.

## Other helpful links

[www.brainstrust.org.uk/brain-tumour-support](http://www.brainstrust.org.uk/brain-tumour-support)  
[www.brainstrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/difficult-conversations-web.pdf](http://www.brainstrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/difficult-conversations-web.pdf)  
[www.brainstrust.org.uk/knowhows](http://www.brainstrust.org.uk/knowhows)

*Expertly checked and updated March 2025.*

---

Registered charitable trust – *brainstrust* is a registered charity in England and Wales (1114634), and Scotland (SC044642).