The Expert Says

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What's the difference between assertiveness and aggression? Assertiveness is about stating, in a calm and clear manner, your preferences, suggestions, agenda and concerns. Aggression, however, generally involves threatening others with a verbal, physical or emotional attack, explains Ramani Durvasula, PhD, a professor of psychology at the University of California at Los Angeles.

You use assertiveness to your advantage when you take charge, handle responsibilities and clearly communicate what you expect of other people—including the consequences if they fail to meet your expectations. These examples of assertiveness show confidence and leadership.

Conversely, you should resort to aggression only in the most desperate situations, such as when you're being physically threatened and must defend yourself, Durvasula says. But be cautious.

Why? Because aggression is likely to be met with more aggression, she says. What that means is, you'll have to be prepared for anything.

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