

ASSERTIVENESS SKILLS: PRACTICAL FORMATION GUIDELINE

Introduction

“Speaking the Truth in Love” (Ephesians 4:15)

In the journey of missionary and religious formation, assertiveness is not simply a skill but a spiritual commitment to living truthfully and lovingly. It involves expressing one’s convictions with clarity and compassion, honouring the dignity of others without resorting to passivity or aggression. Deeply rooted in the freedom of knowing oneself as a beloved child of God and missionary disciple, true assertiveness avoids both self-centeredness and domination. Instead, it fosters authentic relationships, prevents resentment and relational breakdown, and embodies a balance of “truth with charity” and “power with humility,” allowing for genuine connection and mutual respect.

In missionary life, lacking assertiveness causes passivity, resentment, confusion, or breakup. Excessive aggressiveness damages trust and turns service into domination. Assertiveness offers a balanced approach—“truth with charity” or “power with humility.”

This formation module is designed to help formees:

- Cultivate inner clarity and emotional responsibility.
- Express themselves with confidence and respect.
- Navigate conflict and feedback without fear or control.
- Grow into mature agents of communion, not just compliance.

Through daily tools, weekly exercises, reflective assessments, and intentional accompaniment, this guide offers a practical pathway for integrating assertiveness as both a psychological competency and a spiritual virtue—essential for community life, leadership, and mission.

As Claretian missionaries called to listen to the Spirit and proclaim the Word with prophetic clarity, assertiveness enables us to live and speak from the centre of who we are, grounded in God, open to others, and faithful to the truth.

I. Core Definitions and Concepts

Assertiveness is not merely a social skill—it is a posture of inner integrity that reflects a mature sense of self, grounded in truth, dignity, and respect. In the context of formation, assertiveness becomes a crucial tool for fostering authentic relationships, healthy boundaries, and personal responsibility in community and mission. This aligns with the Church’s understanding of human formation as the “foundation of all priestly formation,” particularly in fostering affective maturity and relational capacity (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 43; *Ratio Fundamental*, 94–96).

1. Express Your Feelings, Needs, and Rights Clearly and Respectfully

To be assertive means to honour what is alive within you—your emotions, convictions, and values—and to communicate them in a way that respects both yourself and others.

Example:

- A formand feels hurt because he was left out of a planning meeting. An assertive response would be: *“I felt overlooked when I wasn’t included in the meeting. I value being part of the planning process and would appreciate being informed next time.”*

This avoids blame (“You ignored me!”) and suppression (“It doesn’t matter”), and instead expresses truth with clarity and calm.

Formation Insight: Assertiveness upholds *veritas in caritate* (truth in love), teaching formees to speak truth without aggression and feel deeply without reacting.

2. Ask for What You Want Without Guilt or Manipulation

Many people struggle to make direct requests, often because of fear of rejection or judgment. Assertiveness enables you to make your needs known without demanding or manipulating outcomes.

Example:

- A formand who is struggling with study overload says to his formator: *“I’ve been feeling overwhelmed with the extra responsibilities lately. Would it be possible to adjust the schedule or delegate some tasks?”*

This is different from passivity (“I’ll just try harder”) or manipulation (“Nobody helps me around here; I guess I’ll fail”), and instead expresses a legitimate request clearly and respectfully.

Formation Insight: Asking directly, without guilt or coercion, is a way to build adult-to-adult relationships in community life, based on trust and mutual respect.

3. Take Responsibility for Your Emotions and Actions

Assertiveness requires owning your emotional responses, rather than blaming others for them. You recognize your power to choose your response, and you acknowledge your part in relational dynamics.

Example:

- After a tense group discussion, a formand reflects: *“I reacted defensively during our conversation earlier. I realize that I was carrying frustration from a previous issue, and I want to own that. I’m sorry if it created tension.”*

This is different from blaming (“You made me upset”) or denying (“I wasn’t upset”), and instead takes mature ownership of one’s inner world and behaviour.

Formation Insight: Taking responsibility strengthens self-awareness and prevents the formation of a victim mentality. It promotes emotional honesty, which is foundational for ongoing personal growth and communion with others.

Assertiveness is Distinct From...

3.1. Passivity: Fear-Driven Silence or Avoidance

Passivity involves suppressing one’s needs or voice out of fear of conflict, rejection, or being misunderstood. It often results in internal resentment, burnout, or eventual outbursts.

Examples of Passive Behaviour:

- Saying yes to requests you cannot handle out of fear of disapproval.
- Enduring disrespectful treatment without speaking up.
- Avoiding needed conversations and hoping problems will disappear.

Example: A formand is asked to lead prayer but feels unprepared. Instead of expressing this, he reluctantly agrees, performs poorly, and silently resents the experience. A more assertive response would be: *“I’m honoured you asked me. I don’t feel ready today, but I’d be willing to prepare for another time.”*

Formation Insight: Passivity may appear humble but often stems from insecurity and fear. It weakens authentic community and leads to self-abandonment.

3.2. Aggressiveness: Control or Domination of Others

Aggressiveness happens when someone imposes their needs or feelings on others through force, disrespect, or manipulation. It usually aims to win, control, or dominate instead of fostering mutual understanding.

Examples of Aggressive Behaviour:

- Yelling or using sarcasm to make a point.
- Interrupting or invalidating others during discussions.
- Using guilt or intimidation to get one’s way.

Example in Formation: A formator responds harshly to a mistake in community chores: *“How many times do I have to tell you to do your part? You’re just irresponsible!”* This is aggressive and shaming. An assertive response would be: *“I noticed your task wasn’t completed. I’d like to understand what happened so we can address it together.”*

Formation Insight: Aggressiveness may feel powerful in the moment, but breaks trust and fosters fear. It contradicts the values of nonviolence, respect, and inner freedom that formation seeks to cultivate.

Summary Comparison Table

Behaviour	Root Emotion	Language Style	Impact
Assertive	Confidence & Clarity	“I feel... I need... I ask...”	Builds trust, honours self and others
Passive	Fear & Insecurity	“Whatever you say...” or silence	Creates resentment, lacks clarity
Aggressive	Anger & Control	“You always... You never...”	Destroys connection, provokes fear

Spiritual Reflection

Jesus is the model of assertiveness. He speaks the truth with authority, questions injustice without hatred, and remains centred in his identity regardless of others’ reactions. From his silence before Pilate to his bold challenges to the Pharisees, Jesus integrates strength and gentleness—showing us that holy assertiveness is neither silence nor domination, but loving clarity.

II. Formation Objectives

The purpose of forming individuals in **assertiveness skills** is not merely to improve communication but to form mature missionaries capable of expressing themselves clearly, taking responsibility for their actions, and contributing to healthy community life. Assertiveness supports interior freedom, emotional maturity, and healthy community life.

Specific Objectives:

1. To Distinguish Between Passive, Aggressive, and Assertive Behaviours

Target Competency:

- Formees will be able to **identify and differentiate** the three styles of communication through real-life scenarios, roleplay, and self-assessment.

Example Activity:

- Use vignettes or community incidents to analyse which response is passive, aggressive, or assertive, and reflect on consequences.

Spiritual Insight:

- This develops moral clarity and self-awareness, essential for conversion and growth in discernment.

2. To Express Emotions, Opinions, and Needs with Respect and Clarity

Target Competency:

- Formees will practice **naming their feelings** and **making appropriate requests** in interpersonal situations, using “I” statements and non-defensive language.

Example:

- *“I feel anxious about our upcoming pastoral immersion. Could we have a check-in to clarify roles?”*

Outcome:

- This helps prevent silent resentment, increases transparency, and nurtures deeper trust in relationships.

3. To Set and Maintain Personal Boundaries Without Guilt or Hostility

Target Competency:

- Formees learn to **say No**, define limits, and articulate needs without shame or aggression.

Example:

- *“I won’t be able to join the group outing this weekend. I need some time for rest and reflection.”*

Relevance:

- Prevents burnout and teaches healthy self-care grounded in personal responsibility.

4. To Take Responsibility for One’s Emotions and Behaviour

Target Competency:

- Instead of blaming others, formees will learn to **own their emotional reactions** and explore their deeper roots.

Example:

- *“I realize my anger during the meeting was more about feeling ignored. I’ll work on expressing that more constructively.”*

Formation Value:

- This nurtures humility, inner freedom, and accountability, key traits for mature discipleship.

5. To Practice Assertiveness in Community and Ministry Contexts

Target Competency:

- Formees will apply assertiveness skills in **group work, ministry collaboration, and conflict resolution** within the formation house and in external apostolates.

Examples:

- Giving and receiving constructive feedback.
- Voicing disagreement respectfully in group discernment.
- Managing interpersonal tension with honesty and empathy.

Missionary Implication:

- Assertiveness equips future missionaries to deal with diverse personalities, cultural dynamics, and pastoral challenges without resorting to fear or domination.

6. To Integrate Assertiveness with Christian Virtues**Target Competency:**

- Formees will internalize the **spiritual dimension** of assertiveness: speaking the truth in love (Eph 4:15), respecting others' dignity, and upholding their own.

Example:

- *"I disagree with your idea, but I value your passion and I'm willing to find a common ground."*

Virtues Fostered:

- Charity, courage, prudence, humility, and integrity.

7. To Cultivate the Confidence to Act Even When Feeling Fear or Doubt**Target Competency:**

- Formees develop the habit of "acting as if" they already possess inner strength, growing through practice and positive feedback.

Example:

- Despite feeling nervous, a formand takes the initiative to lead a community prayer or address a concern with a peer.

Growth Marker:

- Moving from fear-based hesitation to faith-based action.

Summary Table of Formation Objectives

Objective	Competency Developed	Formation Benefit
Distinguish behaviour styles	Awareness and discernment	Clarity in communication
Express feelings respectfully	Emotional literacy	Builds trust and authenticity
Set boundaries	Self-respect and care	Prevents burnout and resentment
Take responsibility	Maturity and humility	Inner freedom and healing
Apply assertiveness in context	Practical wisdom	Healthy relationships in mission
Integrate with virtues	Gospel-rooted action	Holiness in communication
Act through fear	Courage and resilience	Grows confidence and leadership

III. Key Skills and Practices

Developing assertiveness requires intentional practice and reflection. The following core skills are essential for a well-rounded, mature, and spiritually grounded assertiveness. They allow formees to speak their truth, respect others, and navigate complex interpersonal dynamics with grace and courage.

1. Self-Awareness: Identifying Your Feelings and Needs

Before you can communicate assertively, you must know what you're feeling and what you need. This involves honest introspection and emotional literacy.

Practices:

- Use a **daily emotion journal** to name emotions experienced throughout the day and identify what triggered them.
- Ask yourself: *“What do I feel? What do I need right now?”*

Example:

- “I’m feeling anxious because I need more preparation time for our community presentation.”

Formation Insight:

- Cultivating interior awareness strengthens one’s ability to live from the heart, not from reactive patterns or unconscious scripts.

2. Clear, Honest Communication: Saying What You Mean

Assertive communication is **truthful, direct, and respectful**. It avoids passive hinting and aggressive blaming.

Practices:

- Use “I” statements: *“I feel... when... because... I would prefer...”*
- Practice concise speech: avoid over-explaining or apologizing unnecessarily.

Example:

- Instead of: “Sorry if this sounds selfish, but I was kind of hoping I could maybe have some time alone...”
- Try: “I need some time alone this afternoon to recharge. I’ll rejoin the group later.”

Formation Insight:

- Speaking with clarity honours both truth and charity. It models Gospel communication: “Let your Yes mean Yes and your No mean No” (Matt 5:37).

3. The Right to Say “No” Without Guilt

An assertive person knows they have the right to protect their boundaries and choose their commitments.

Practices:

- Reflect on your limits: Where do you tend to say yes out of fear?
- Practice saying “no” graciously, without justification.

Example:

- “I’m not available for this extra task right now. I’m already committed to something else.”

Formation Insight:

- Healthy boundaries are not selfish—they create space for responsible love and sustainable service.

4. Assertive Listening: Respecting the Other’s Voice

Assertiveness isn’t just about expressing yourself—it’s also about **receiving others** with openness and respect.

Practices:

- Listen without interrupting.
- Paraphrase what the other said: “What I hear you saying is... Is that right?”

Example:

- A peer shares disappointment with you. You respond: “I can see this was frustrating for you. Thank you for being honest.”

Formation Insight:

- As Pope Francis emphasizes, authentic dialogue requires both speaking and listening (Cfr. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 171–173).

5. Giving and Receiving Constructive Feedback

Assertiveness allows you to **challenge others lovingly** and also receive correction with grace.

Practices:

- Use the “sandwich” approach: Affirm – Suggest – Affirm.
- When receiving feedback, listen attentively before responding.

Example:

- Giving: “I appreciate your dedication. One thing to improve might be time management for group tasks. But your reliability is valued.”
- Receiving: “Thank you for the feedback. I’ll reflect on it and work to improve.”

Formation Insight:

- Constructive feedback fosters growth, accountability, and mutual respect.

6. Responding to Conflict Without Aggression

Assertive people face tension without avoiding it or escalating it. They aim for **resolution, not retaliation**.

Practices:

- Use calm tone and body language during conflict.
- Acknowledge the other person’s viewpoint even when disagreeing.
- Seek reconciliation (Mathew 18;15-17)

Example:

- “I understand you’re under pressure, but when you raised your voice earlier, I felt disrespected. Let’s talk about how to move forward.”

Formation Insight:

- Conflict handled assertively becomes a doorway to communion, not division.

7. Taking Emotional Responsibility

Assertive individuals own their feelings and actions. They do not blame others for their reactions.

Practices:

- Use “I feel” instead of “You make me feel.”

- Reflect regularly: *What part of this is mine to own?*

Example:

- “I was frustrated by the group’s silence, but I also realized I expected too much without checking in.”

Formation Insight:

- Owning one’s emotions leads to inner freedom and prevents the victim mindset.

8. “Act As If”: Practicing Courage Even When Afraid

Assertiveness is sometimes practiced **before it is fully felt**. It involves courageous action in the presence of fear.

Practices:

- Visualize yourself speaking confidently in a feared situation.
- Choose one small assertive act per day, even if your voice shakes.

Example:

- You’re nervous about raising a concern with your formator. You say, “This is difficult for me, but I need to talk about something important.”

Formation Insight:

- As Meister Eckhart said, “For the one who has let go, nothing can stand in the way.” Practicing courage slowly dissolves fear.

9. Detaching From the Outcome

Assertiveness is about **expressing truth**, not controlling how others respond.

Practices:

- After an honest conversation, resist the urge to “make it right” or change someone’s mind.
- Affirm yourself for speaking authentically, regardless of the outcome.

Example:

- You ask a peer to change a behaviour, and they don’t respond favourably. You reflect: “I spoke truthfully and respectfully. That is enough for now.”

Formation Insight:

- Letting go of control is a spiritual exercise in trust—God works through our faithfulness, not just through results.

10. Practicing Assertiveness in Real-Time Formation Scenarios

Formees need to apply these skills in **community life**, pastoral encounters, and interpersonal dynamics.

Scenarios:

- Disagreeing respectfully in community meetings.
- Asking for clarity when a task seems unfair.
- Expressing frustration when boundaries are crossed.

Group Exercise:

- Weekly “assertiveness lab” where formees practice real scenarios with feedback.

Assertiveness is not a technique—it is a **way of being** that aligns with Gospel values: honesty, love, courage, humility, and integrity. Practicing these skills daily leads to a missionary presence that is clear, non-violent, and authentically human. Assertiveness helps formees move from fear to freedom, from avoidance to engagement, and from silence to communion.

IV. Daily Formation Tools

Assertiveness is cultivated gradually through mindful practice, self-reflection, and community feedback. These daily tools help formees build emotional awareness, strengthen communication, and integrate assertiveness into their identity as future missionaries.

1. Assertiveness Journal

Purpose: To track situations, responses, and feelings related to assertiveness each day.

How to Use:

At the end of each day, write briefly about:

- A moment when you **spoke up or didn’t**.
- What you **felt**, what you **said**, and what you **learned**.
- What you would do **differently next time**.

Example Prompt:

- *“Today, I didn’t speak up when someone skipped my turn during sharing. I felt dismissed and hesitant. Tomorrow, I want to say: ‘I haven’t had the chance to share yet.’”*

Formation Benefit: This develops self-awareness and builds courage by reflecting on small victories and missed opportunities.

2. “I-Statement” Practice

Purpose: To practice using assertive, non-blaming language for self-expression.

How to Use:

Each day, take one situation—real or imagined—and reframe your reaction using an **I-statement**:

- “I feel ___ when ___ because ___. I would prefer ___.”

Example:

- “I feel frustrated when my contributions are ignored because I want to feel heard. I’d prefer we ensure everyone gets a turn.”

Formation Benefit: This helps formees internalize respectful self-expression and reduces reactive speech.

3. Boundary Awareness Check-In

Purpose: To recognize when to say “yes,” “no,” or “maybe” without guilt or resentment.

How to Use:

In the evening, reflect:

- Did I agree to something today that I didn't have the energy for?
- Did I say no when needed?
- Where did I feel pressured or unclear about my limits?

Prayer Prompt:

- *"Lord, teach me to love with strength and to serve with freedom, not fear."*

Formation Benefit: Reinforces personal responsibility and prevents passive resentment or overextension.

4. 3-Minute "Pause-Breathe-Pray"

Purpose: To ground oneself before emotionally charged conversations or group interactions.

How to Use:

Before a meeting or conversation:

1. **Pause** – Be still and notice your feelings.
2. **Breathe** – Deep breaths to centre your attention.
3. **Pray** – Offer a short prayer: *"Lord, give me the grace to speak truth with love."*

Formation Benefit: Helps formees respond, not react. Encourages prayerful intentionality.

5. "Act-As-If" Exercise

Purpose: To encourage courage in situations where the formand feels insecure or afraid.

How to Use:

Choose one situation per day where you "act as if" you are already confident and assertive. Even if you feel nervous, speak or behave as your best self would.

Example:

- If you fear asking a question in a class, do it anyway with composure: *"I'd like to ask something that I find unclear."*

Formation Benefit: Builds internal confidence through repeated action. As behaviour changes, belief follows.

6. Affirmation Statement for the Day

Purpose: To strengthen inner dialogue and silence the inner critic that often inhibits assertiveness.

How to Use:

Each morning, choose or write an affirmation and repeat it throughout the day.

Examples:

- "My feelings and needs matter."

- “I can speak clearly and lovingly.”
- “I do not need permission to be myself.”

Formation Benefit: Strengthens healthy self-esteem and prepares the formand for difficult interactions.

7. Assertive Observation Practice

Purpose: To learn from others and observe dynamics with a discerning eye.

How to Use:

Choose one interaction to observe:

- Was the person assertive, passive, or aggressive?
- How did others respond?
- What did I learn?

Reflection Prompt:

- *“What did I admire or avoid in the way that person communicated?”*

Formation Benefit: Fosters discernment and builds an internal compass for effective and respectful communication.

8. End-of-Day Assertiveness Review (5-Minute Rule)

Purpose: To briefly consolidate learning from the day.

How to Use (5 questions – 1 minute each):

1. Did I express my feelings honestly today?
2. Did I ask for what I needed?
3. Did I respect my boundaries and others’?
4. Was I able to listen assertively?
5. Where did I avoid conflict or act out of fear?

Formation Benefit: Encourages daily accountability and gently highlights areas for growth.

Daily formation tools turn assertiveness from a vague idea into daily habits. The aim isn't perfection but consistent growth in courage, clarity, and charity. These practices help formees be honest in their vocations—free from fear, full of love.

V. Weekly Formation Exercises

Assertiveness should be practiced communally and personally. Weekly exercises let formees rehearse real-life situations, get feedback, and reflect in community, gradually building confidence, clarity, and compassion. These can fit into weekly sessions, small groups, or personal accompaniment.

1. Assertiveness Roleplay Lab

Purpose: To practice assertive communication in real or hypothetical situations.

Instructions:

- In pairs or triads, take turns playing three roles:

1. **The assertive speaker**
2. **The listener (who may resist, challenge, or cooperate)**
3. **The observer (gives feedback based on assertiveness criteria)**

Scenarios to Practice:

- Expressing disagreement in a respectful way.
- Saying “No” to a request without feeling guilty.
- Giving feedback to a peer about a behaviour that affects you.
- Requesting support or clarity from a formator.

Debrief Questions:

- How did it feel to speak assertively?
- Where did I hold back or become reactive?
- What did I learn about myself?

Formation Value: Builds experiential learning through embodied practice. Helps formees integrate knowledge into action.

2. Scripture Reflection and Dialogue

Purpose: To connect assertiveness with the life and mission of Jesus and the values of the Gospel.

Weekly Themes & Texts (sample 4-week cycle):

Week	Theme	Scripture
1	Jesus speaks truth in love	John 4:1–30 (The Samaritan Woman)
2	Boundaries and inner freedom	Luke 4:42–44 (Jesus withdraws from the crowd)
3	Courage in confrontation	John 8:1–11 (The Woman Caught in Adultery)
4	Nonviolence and self-possession	Matthew 27:11–14 (Jesus before Pilate)

Discussion Prompts:

- How does Jesus model assertiveness here?
- What fears might I need to face to speak as he does?
- Where is God inviting me to greater honesty or clarity?

Formation Value: Promotes theological reflection and spiritual integration of the virtue of assertiveness.

3. “Circle of Truth” Sharing

Purpose: To normalize vulnerability and affirm each other’s growth in assertiveness.

How It Works:

- In a safe, respectful setting (e.g., weekly community group), each person shares:
 - One situation where they practiced assertiveness.
 - One area they found challenging.
 - One insight or commitment for the coming week.

Facilitator Guidelines:

- No correcting, only affirming or empathetic listening.
- End with a brief prayer: *“Lord, help us speak the truth in love.”*

Formation Value: Builds mutual trust, supports emotional honesty, and reduces fear of judgment.

4. Assertiveness Scripture-Mantra Walk

Purpose: To internalize assertiveness through body and prayer.

How It Works:

- Choose a short mantra inspired by Scripture (e.g., “My voice matters,” “Jesus, give me courage,” “Let your Yes mean Yes”).
- Go for a meditative walk (alone or in silence as a group) repeating the mantra inwardly.
- Afterward, journal for 10 minutes: What surfaced? What truth do I need to live more fully?

Formation Value: Connects assertiveness to prayer and embodiment; promotes reflective integration.

5. Listening Lab: Practicing Assertive Listening

Purpose: To practice receiving others without interruption, correction, or withdrawal.

Instructions:

- In pairs, one speaks for 3 minutes about something important. The other listens actively (without fixing or reacting), then paraphrases:
 - “What I hear you saying is...”
 - “That sounds important to you.”
- Then switch roles.

Debrief Questions:

- How did it feel to be truly listened to?
- What was hard about listening without reacting?

Formation Value: Teaches empathy, respect, and presence—essential components of Gospel-centred community.

6. Assertiveness Inventory and Goal-Setting

Purpose: To evaluate one’s progress and set a clear goal for the coming week.

How It Works:

- At the end of the week, answer the following reflection questions (individually or with your formator):
 - Did I speak up when I needed to?
 - Did I overextend myself out of fear of saying no?
 - Did I express a difficult emotion clearly?
 - What situation challenged me most?
 - What do I want to practice this coming week?

Formation Value: Encourages accountability, reinforces progress, and fosters intentionality.

7. Community Case Study: Assertiveness in Real Conflicts

Purpose: To reflect on a real (anonymous or guided) situation in the formation house and analyse assertiveness dynamics.

Process:

- Present a real or fictional community conflict (e.g., someone dominating conversations, disrespecting chores).
- As a group, discuss:
 - What was passive, aggressive, or assertive?
 - What might have been a healthier response?
 - What Gospel values are at stake?

Formation Value: Encourages communal responsibility, moral discernment, and practical wisdom.

Assertiveness is genuine when practiced in relationships, not just thought about alone. Weekly exercises promote group growth, boost emotional and spiritual intelligence, and enhance the disciple's ability to live as a truthful, respectful, and courageous missionary.

VI. Indicators of Growth in Assertiveness

Growth in assertiveness isn't just about confidence or eloquence but involves integrating inner freedom, respectful expression, and responsible behaviour. These help determine if a person is progressing toward healthier relationships and personal integrity.

Each indicator includes:

- A **description** of the behaviour
- **Examples** from formation life
- **What it reveals** about interior growth

1. Consistent Use of Clear, Respectful Language

Description: The formand expresses thoughts, needs, and emotions using “I” statements and non-blaming language.

Examples:

- “I felt hurt when I wasn’t informed about the schedule change.”
- “I need more time to reflect before giving an answer.”

Reveals:

- Self-awareness and emotional responsibility
- Courage to name one’s experience without shaming others

2. Ability to Say “No” or Set Boundaries Without Guilt

Description: The formand can decline requests or define limits kindly and firmly, without over-explaining or withdrawing.

Examples:

- “I’m not available for that extra task right now.”
- “I need quiet time after evening prayer; can we talk tomorrow?”

Reveals:

- Healthy self-esteem

- Freedom from people-pleasing tendencies
- Respect for time, energy, and vocation

3. Approaching Conflict Calmly and Constructively

Description: The formand initiates or engages in difficult conversations without aggression or avoidance.

Examples:

- “Can we clarify something that happened earlier? I’d like to understand better.”
- “I think we’ve misunderstood each other—can we take a moment to talk?”

Reveals:

- Emotional maturity
- Discomfort tolerance
- Ability to prioritize relationship over being right

4. Asking Directly for Support, Feedback, or Clarification

Description: The formand articulates needs openly without hints, complaints, or manipulation.

Examples:

- “Could you help me understand what’s expected for this role?”
- “I’d appreciate some feedback on how I handled the meeting.”

Reveals:

- Initiative and clarity of intention
- Willingness to grow and improve

5. Receiving Feedback Without Defensiveness

Description: The formand listens attentively, acknowledges input, and reflects constructively—even when the feedback is difficult.

Examples:

- “Thank you. That’s hard to hear, but I want to reflect on it.”
- “I didn’t realize that—I’ll work on it.”

Reveals:

- Humility and openness
- Security in one’s identity
- Detachment from ego-based reactions

6. Standing Firm in One’s Truth Without Needing to Win

Description: The formand can express convictions clearly without trying to dominate or convince others.

Examples:

- “This is what I believe is right in this situation, and I respect that others may see it differently.”
- “I’ve shared my view; I trust the group’s discernment.”

Reveals:

- Inner freedom and balance
- Non-attachment to outcomes
- Clarity of conscience

7. Recognizing and Correcting Passive or Aggressive Tendencies

Description: The formand identifies when they’ve fallen into silence, sarcasm, over-compliance, or emotional outbursts—and takes steps to repair and learn.

Examples:

- “I noticed I shut down during our discussion. I’d like to revisit that topic now.”
- “I was too sharp in my comment yesterday. I’m sorry—I was frustrated.”

Reveals:

- Ongoing self-reflection
- Desire for relational integrity
- Growth mindset

8. Respecting Others’ Assertiveness

Description: The formand accepts others’ “No,” recognizes their boundaries, and validates their feelings without judgment or reactivity.

Examples:

- “Thank you for being honest—I appreciate your clarity.”
- “I understand you need space; I’ll wait until you’re ready.”

Reveals:

- Mutual respect and empathy
- Absence of control or neediness
- Gospel-based listening posture

9. Demonstrating Assertiveness in Community and Mission Contexts

Description: The formand applies assertiveness in real-world dynamics—teamwork, pastoral ministry, group discernment, and interpersonal challenges.

Examples:

- Proposing ideas respectfully during meetings
- Navigating miscommunication in apostolate without gossip or withdrawal

Reveals:

- Integration of skills into vocation
- Leadership potential rooted in collaboration and clarity

10. Celebrating Progress and Naming Growth

Description: The formand is aware of personal change and can articulate where they have grown in assertiveness.

Examples:

- “A few months ago, I would have stayed silent, but this time I spoke with calm and clarity.”
- “I’m learning to say no without guilt, and it’s bringing me peace.”

Reveals:

- Graced awareness
- Gratitude for the journey
- Confidence rooted in lived experience

Summary Table: Indicators of Growth

Indicator	What It Shows
Clear, respectful language	Self-awareness and emotional control
Healthy boundary-setting	Self-esteem and responsibility
Constructive conflict engagement	Maturity and empathy
Asking for what one needs	Initiative and clarity
Receiving feedback well	Openness and humility
Non-dominating truth-telling	Inner freedom and peace
Self-correction	Desire to grow and reflect
Respecting others' boundaries	Mutuality and respect
Applying assertiveness in real contexts	Integration and readiness for mission
Naming one's growth	Awareness and joy in the process

True growth in assertiveness manifests not only in what is said but **in how a person lives—freely, truthfully, and respectfully**. These indicators help formators and formees track development, celebrate progress, and address areas needing further accompaniment. Assertiveness, when fully integrated, becomes not a skill but a virtue: a mature way of being in Christ, for others, and in truth.

VII. Assessment Tool (for Formees)

Purpose: To help formees reflect on their development in assertiveness in a structured, prayerful, and formative manner. This tool promotes self-awareness, personal responsibility, and spiritual maturity.

Part A. Self-Rating Scale

Instructions: Rate yourself honestly on each statement below, using this scale:

Scale	Meaning
1	Never or rarely true of me
2	Sometimes true of me
3	Often true of me
4	Consistently true of me
5	Always true of me, even under pressure

Assertiveness Self-Assessment Statements:

#	Statement	Score (1–5)
1	I can say what I feel without blaming others.	
2	I express my needs clearly and respectfully.	
3	I can say “No” without guilt or excessive explanation.	
4	I take responsibility for my emotional reactions.	
5	I ask directly for support, clarification, or feedback.	
6	I speak honestly even when it feels uncomfortable.	
7	I respond to criticism without becoming defensive.	

8	I can remain calm and clear during conflict.	
9	I respect others' boundaries and "No" responses.	
10	I apologize when I realize I've hurt or disrespected someone.	
11	I listen actively without interrupting or reacting.	
12	I notice and stop myself from being passive or aggressive.	
13	I affirm my voice and feelings even when others disagree.	
14	I can express disagreement without hostility.	
15	I can speak with honesty and love during community meetings or ministry work.	

Scoring Guide:

- **61–75:** Excellent integration. You are living assertively with inner freedom.
- **46–60:** Solid progress. Some areas need reinforcement.
- **31–45:** Growing awareness. You need consistent practice and support.
- **Below 30:** Foundational development needed. Consider deeper accompaniment.

Part B. Reflective Journal Prompts

Instructions:

Choose 2–3 prompts to reflect on in writing or with your formator/director.

1. A time I was assertive this week—and how I felt afterward.
2. A situation where I stayed silent—what stopped me from speaking?
3. A time I confused assertiveness with aggression or passivity.
4. A conversation I need to have but feel afraid to start.
5. Something I need to say "No" to, and why it's hard for me.
6. How do I usually respond to conflict—avoid, attack, or engage?
7. In what ways is my assertiveness helping me grow in freedom?
8. How does Jesus' example guide me in expressing truth and love?

Part C. Goal-Setting for the Coming Week

Instructions:

Based on your self-assessment and reflection, choose **one concrete goal** to practice over the next 7 days.

Goal Examples:

- "This week, I will speak up during our group discernment, even if I feel nervous."
- "I will say 'No' to taking on a task I cannot realistically handle."
- "I will ask for feedback after leading community prayer."

Goal:

Support I Need:

Optional: Accountability Conversation with Formator

Bring your completed assessment and journal to your next accompaniment session. Reflect together on:

- What strengths you're discovering

- What blocks or fears remain
- What support can be offered (e.g., roleplay, affirmation, challenge)

Assessment in formation is not about performance but **awareness and alignment with the call to truth and charity**. This tool helps formees become more intentional, integrated, and empowered to live out assertiveness as a spiritual and relational virtue—serving the mission of Christ with clarity and compassion.

VIII. Discernment Criteria for Growth in Assertiveness

Assertiveness, when rightly formed, is more than a communication style; it's a fruit of inner freedom, truthfulness, and courage rooted in Christ. Growth should be discerned through internal motivations, spiritual maturity, and relational transformation, not just external behaviours.

These discernment criteria provide guiding questions and signs that help formees and their formators evaluate **how assertiveness is being integrated** in light of the Gospel and the demands of missionary life.

1. Motivation: Why Am I Speaking Up (or Staying Silent)?

Discernment Questions:

- Am I expressing myself out of love and clarity—or out of fear, pride, or a need to control?
- Am I staying silent because of humility or because of fear of rejection?
- When I choose not to speak, is it intentional and prayerful—or passive avoidance?

Signs of Growth:

- Greater intentionality in speech.
- Decreasing reliance on approval or control.
- Peace even when misunderstood, because truth was spoken in love.

2. Identity: Do I Believe My Voice Has Value?

Discernment Questions:

- Do I believe I am worthy of being heard and respected?
- Do I affirm my own feelings and needs without needing others to validate them?
- Do I respect others' voices as equal to mine?

Signs of Growth:

- Increased self-respect and self-confidence.
- Ability to speak from personal conviction without arrogance.
- Humble listening to others' perspectives.

3. Integration: Am I the Same in All Settings?

Discernment Questions:

- Do I practice assertiveness only with “safe” people, or consistently across situations?
- Am I assertive in formation but passive or aggressive in ministry—or vice versa?
- Is my assertiveness grounded in the same values, regardless of context?

Signs of Growth:

- Consistent integrity in community, apostolate, and personal life.
- Courage to speak truth even when it's uncomfortable or inconvenient.
- Awareness of context, yet stable core behaviour.

4. Relational Impact: Are My Words Building or Breaking Communion?

Discernment Questions:

- Do others feel safe and respected around me?
- Am I aware of how my words affect others emotionally and spiritually?
- Do I encourage honesty in others through my own example?

Signs of Growth:

- Others feel empowered, not silenced, by your assertiveness.
- Your communication contributes to trust and mutual respect.
- You are open to reconciling when your assertiveness creates tension.

5. Responsibility: Do I Own My Emotions and Actions?**Discernment Questions:**

- Do I blame others for how I feel or for my lack of expression?
- When I react strongly, do I reflect and take ownership—or rationalize it away?
- Am I growing in the ability to repair when I overstep or hurt others?

Signs of Growth:

- Regular self-reflection and examination of conscience.
- Less blaming, more personal accountability.
- Desire to reconcile when communication fails.

6. Spiritual Root: Is My Assertiveness Anchored in My Identity in Christ?**Discernment Questions:**

- Do I see assertiveness as a way of living in the truth, like Jesus?
- Am I acting from my belovedness or from wounds of insecurity?
- Is my speech increasingly aligned with Gospel values—truth, love, nonviolence, justice?

Signs of Growth:

- Greater interior freedom and less fear of human opinion.
- Assertiveness becoming a form of witness to truth and compassion.
- A deeper sense that “speaking the truth in love” is part of discipleship (Eph 4:15).

7. Openness to Growth: Am I Willing to Be Challenged?**Discernment Questions:**

- Do I invite feedback about how I express myself?
- Can I distinguish between growth and self-justification?
- Do I pray about my communication patterns and ask for grace to mature?

Signs of Growth:

- Welcoming correction as a gift.
- Willingness to grow in both strength and sensitivity.
- Desire to become more Christ-like in word and presence.

Spiritual Touchstone for Discernment

“Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each one.” — **Colossians 4:6**

True assertiveness is not about speaking more often or more forcefully. It is about **speaking with truth, love, and clarity** in a way that reveals Christ in you.

Suggested Practice for Formees**Weekly Examen for Assertiveness (5–10 min):**

- When today did I speak the truth with love?
- When did I avoid speaking out of fear or need for approval?
- Did I respect others' right to say "No"?
- What do I need to ask the Lord for grace to express more freely?

Discernment of growth in assertiveness is ultimately a matter of the heart—**Am I growing in freedom, honesty, and love?** These criteria help illuminate the interior journey of a formand becoming more authentic, courageous, and Christ-centred in every relationship and every word.

IX. Accompaniment Guidelines for Formators

Assertiveness is a skill and a sign of emotional maturity. A formator's role is to create a safe space where the formand can grow in clarity, courage, and communion. They do not impose assertiveness but model, invite, and nurture it.

Formators should:

- Model assertive communication
- Create safe spaces for expression
- Challenge passive/aggressive patterns
- Affirm growth
- Accompany deeper emotional struggles

1. Model Assertiveness Authentically

Why it matters: Formees learn more from how formators speak and behave than from what they are told. When a formator expresses truth clearly, listens respectfully, and names boundaries calmly, it becomes a living formation lesson.

Practices:

- Use "I" statements during correction or feedback: *"I feel concerned when I see... because..."*
- Gently name difficult truths with respect and compassion.
- Show openness to disagreement or dialogue without reacting defensively.

Impact on Formees:

- Encourages them to imitate healthy patterns of communication.
- Demonstrates that truth and charity can co-exist.

2. Create a Culture of Safe Expression

Why it matters: Assertiveness grows best in an atmosphere of psychological safety, where formees know their voice will be heard and valued.

Practices:

- Set norms in group settings that encourage speaking up and ensure no one dominates.
- Use open-ended questions: *"How did you feel in that situation?"*
- Validate the formand's perspective, even if you do not agree.

Impact on Formees:

- Builds courage to speak without fear of punishment or ridicule.
- Helps introverted or wounded individuals to find their voice.

3. Identify and Gently Challenge Passive or Aggressive Patterns

Why it matters: Some formees may default to silence, withdrawal, sarcasm, or control as learned patterns of communication.

Practices:

- Reflect back observed behaviour: *“I noticed you agreed quickly—did you really want to say yes?” “Your tone was intense. What were you feeling underneath?”*
- Explore the underlying fear or belief blocking healthy assertiveness.
- Invite them to “rehearse” a different, more assertive response.

Impact on Formees:

- Awakens them to unconscious habits.
- Creates a bridge toward more integrated and responsible choices.

4. Reinforce Growth with Positive Feedback

Why it matters: Naming progress strengthens a formand’s motivation and awareness of change.

Practices:

- Affirm specific moments of assertiveness: *“You spoke clearly in the group—thank you for that.”*
- Acknowledge both effort and effect: *“It wasn’t easy to say that, but it brought needed clarity.”*
- Offer encouragement when a formand steps out of their comfort zone.

Impact on Formees:

- Increases confidence in one’s voice.
- Encourages consistency and integration of assertiveness.

5. Accompany the Inner Journey Behind the Voice

Why it matters: Assertiveness isn’t only about speaking—it reveals deeper themes of identity, fear, shame, or woundedness.

Practices:

- Ask reflective questions: *“What makes it hard for you to speak up?” “What did you learn about expressing your needs growing up?”*
- Integrate this journey into spiritual direction and therapy referrals as needed.
- Hold space for painful stories behind communication blocks.

Impact on Formees:

- Encourages healing of inner wounds that block freedom.
- Deepens emotional intelligence and spiritual maturity.

6. Use Communal Experiences to Develop Assertiveness

Why it matters: Formation houses offer daily opportunities to practice and reflect on communication dynamics.

Practices:

- Debrief group conflicts or tensions with spiritual and emotional guidance.
- Facilitate group reflections on healthy disagreement, boundaries, and directness.
- Observe community roles: Who is always silent? Who dominates? Who avoids conflict?

Impact on Formees:

- Learns to navigate relationships in real time.
- Helps integrate assertiveness into mission and community life.

7. Link Assertiveness to Vocation and Gospel Witness

Why it matters: Assertiveness is not only a psychological tool but a spiritual virtue of truth, love, and fidelity.

Practices:

- Teach assertiveness through Scripture (e.g., Jesus before Pilate, Paul’s letters).
- Frame it theologically: speaking truth with love is part of evangelization and leadership.
- Connect it to mission: clear and respectful communication is essential in pastoral work.

Impact on Formees:

- Internalizes assertiveness as a Christian virtue, not just a technique.
- Strengthens readiness for leadership and service.

8. Use a Formation Review Framework

Why it matters: Regular feedback conversations allow intentional tracking of growth and setbacks.

Practices:

- Integrate assertiveness into individual formation plans and evaluations.
- Ask questions during evaluations like:
 - *“How are you growing in expressing your needs?”*
 - *“What feedback have you received about how you communicate?”*
 - *“What area of assertiveness do you still struggle with?”*
- Use the Indicators of Growth (Section VII) as a reference checklist.

Impact on Formees:

- Encourages self-assessment and concrete goals.
- Embeds assertiveness as part of holistic maturity.

♦ Summary Table: Formator’s Role in Developing Assertiveness

Role of the Formator	Concrete Action	Formation Impact
Model assertiveness	Use clear, respectful speech	Provides lived example
Create safety	Validate and invite honest sharing	Reduces fear, builds trust
Challenge unhealthy patterns	Name and reframe passivity/aggression	Awakens self-awareness
Reinforce growth	Praise specific acts of clarity and courage	Builds confidence
Accompany wounds	Explore stories behind speech patterns	Fosters healing
Teach through community	Facilitate group discussions and feedback	Embeds learning communally
Root in mission and faith	Show how truth and love build the Kingdom	Links assertiveness to vocation
Evaluate intentionally	Use reviews and reflections	Keeps growth visible and accountable

The formator's presence, posture, and words can either free or restrict a formand's assertiveness. By modelling, inviting, and guiding patiently, the formator mirrors Christ, who spoke with truth and compassion, challenged with love, and listened with heart.

Conclusion

Assertiveness in missionary and religious formation signifies a transformative journey that prompts us to move from fear and silence toward authentic self-expression and freedom. It is a deeply personal process shaped by struggles with passivity, shame, and hesitation, along with moments of grace, reflection, and growing trust in God's love.

Assertiveness involves honouring our boundaries and beliefs while also listening to and respecting others' voices and dignity. It isn't about aggression or self-interest, but about fostering inner freedom that allows us to connect with others sincerely, compassionately, and humbly.

Drawing inspiration from Jesus and St. Anthony Mary Claret, we see that assertiveness helps us build harmonious communities, take personal responsibility, and communicate clearly and compassionately. This change prepares missionaries to bear witness to the Kingdom with both courage and love, fostering genuine connections and hope in their service.