

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

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ASSERTIVENESS

Assertiveness Means:

- Having self respect
- Taking responsibility for myself
- Recognising my own needs and wants independently of others
- Making clear “I” statements about how I feel and what I think
- Allowing myself to make mistakes
- Allowing myself to enjoy my successes
- Changing my mind
- Not seeing situations in terms of win or lose, but being prepared to compromise
- Being open about my feelings - both negative and positive
- Understanding that a rejection of my ideas is not the same as rejection of myself
- Asking for what I want
- Setting clear boundaries
- Recognising and respecting the rights and needs of other people

Assertiveness involves standing up for legitimate rights and expressing thoughts, feelings and beliefs in direct, honest, and appropriate ways which do not violate the rights of others. The basic message in assertion is:

- “This is what I think.”
- “This is what I feel.”
- “This is how I see the situation.”

The message expresses ‘who the person is’ and is said without domination or degrading other individuals. Two types of respect are involved in assertion: respect for oneself and respect for others.

An integral part of assertive behaviour is the recognition of rights, responsibilities, and consequences. The person expressing him/herself needs to consider what his/her rights are in that situation and what the rights are of the others involved. The individual also needs to be cognisant of his/her responsibilities and the possible consequences of his/her assertiveness.

Contrary to popular opinion, assertion is not primarily a means of getting what one wants or a way of controlling or subtly manipulating others. The goal is simply open and direct communication and trying to ensure that both (or all) parties’ needs are at least partially met.

Assertiveness needs to be specifically distinguished from both aggression and compliance. In aggressive behaviour, the individual expresses his/her feelings and opinions but does so in a punishing, threatening assaultive, demanding or hostile manner. The basic message is:

- “This is what I think – you’re wrong for believing differently.”
- “This is what I want – what you want isn’t important.”
- “This is what I feel – your feelings don’t count.”

A major characteristic of aggression is the achievement of one’s goals at the expense of the other individual. It implies a lack of respect for others’ needs and the usual objective is to dominate and win.

Compliance (or non-assertion) involves violating one’s own rights by failing to express feelings, thoughts, and beliefs, or expressing them in such an apologetic, diffident, self-effacing manner that they can easily be disregarded by others. The total message that is communicated is:

- “I don’t count – you do.”
- “My feelings don’t matter – yours do.”
- “My thoughts aren’t relevant – yours are.”

Such non-assertion shows a lack of respect for one’s own needs and can communicate a subtle lack of respect for the other individual. The goal of non-assertion is to appease others and to avoid conflict at any cost. There are a variety of reasons why people fail to behave assertively, and some of the more common ones include:

- Mistaking firm assertion for aggression
- Mistaking non-assertion for politeness, or helpfulness
- Failure to accept personal rights
- Anxiety about negative consequences
- Lack of appropriate skills

SELF-RESPECT

- ☺ Behaving assertively demonstrates that we value ourselves.
- ☺ Each time we behave assertively our self-respect rises.
- ☺ Accepting ourselves as we are is more productive than constantly comparing ourselves with other people.
- ☺ When things go wrong in our lives we need to remind ourselves that we are worthwhile.
- ☺ Demonstrating respect for ourselves leads to gaining respect from others.

Compliments

- ☺ Learning to 'let in' compliments we are given increases our self-esteem.
- ☺ Accept a compliment gracefully – check that you are not throwing it back in someone's face.
- ☺ Disclose your positive feelings – give compliments to others.

Remember:

Taking the risk of trying something new is a good way of building self-respect.

WHAT IT TAKES TO BE MORE ASSERTIVE

To become more assertive we need:

- Some desire to change our behaviour.
- A willingness to take some risks, initially in low threat situations and then, as our confidence and skills increase, in more risky situations.
- A willingness to live with the fact that sometimes we will not get our way.
- A willingness to accept the fact that there is no such thing as a perfect response that will handle every situation.
- A willingness not to expect 'magic dust' answers to complex situations.
- A willingness to examine ourselves and be open to new ways of thinking and handling situations.
- A willingness to accept the fact that we will not dramatically change overnight.
- A willingness to want to be liked by other people but an equal willingness to accept the fact that it will not always work out that way.
- A willingness to want fairness and to do everything we can to be treated fairly, but to work on not allowing ourselves to be excessively upset when it doesn't occur.
- A willingness to accept the fact that acquiring skills requires effort and practice.
- A willingness to put forth the necessary effort and to practice.

ASSERTIVENESS

There are 3 main behavioural types:

NON-ASSERTIVE (Passive)

Non-assertion involves violating one's own rights by failing to express honest feelings, thoughts and beliefs and consequently permitting others to violate oneself.

AGGRESSIVE

Aggression involves directly standing up for personal rights and expressing thoughts, feelings and beliefs in a way which is often dishonest, usually inappropriate and always violates the rights of the other person.

ASSERTIVE

Assertiveness means standing up for personal rights and expressing thoughts, feelings and beliefs in direct, honest and appropriate ways which do not violate another person's rights.

Assertiveness involves taking responsibility for your actions; you choose your behaviour.

You take responsibility not blame.

It involves becoming accustomed to saying:

“I feel”

“I think”

“I believe”

And, most important of all, to saying: ‘NO’ without feeling guilty.

COMPARISON OF NON-ASSERTIVE /AGGRESSIVE /ASSERTIVE BEHAVIOURS

NON-ASSERTIVE BEVAHIOUR

Characteristics of the behaviour	Emotionally dishonest, indirect, inhibited.
Your feelings when you engage in the behaviour	Hurt, anxious – both at the time and later.
The other person's feeling when you engage in this behaviour	Pity, irritation.
Outcome	You do not get what you want.
Payoff	Conflict, tension and anxiety. Avoids aversive situations, averts confrontation.

AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR

Characteristics of the behaviour	Direct; self-enhancing at the expense of others.
Your feelings when you engage in the behaviour	Righteous; superior at the time. Possibly guilty later.
The other person's feeling when you engage in the behaviour	Angry; vengeful
Outcome	Often get what you require - but at the expense of others.
Payoff	Vents anger. Feels superior.

ASSERTIVE BEHAVIOUR

Characteristics of the behaviour	Emotionally honest, direct, expressive, self-enhancing.
Your feelings when you engage in this behaviour	Confident, self-respecting at the time and later.
The other person's feelings when you engage in this way	Generally respect.
Outcome	Often successful in getting what you want.
Payoff	Feels good – increase self-respect and confidence. Improved relationships.

ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS

You need two kinds of skills ----- VERBAL and NONVERBAL

VERBAL COMMUNICATION

1. Should be clear, straightforward and to the point. Avoid giving long-winded explanations or excuses. Do not allow yourself to be side-tracked by the other person.
2. Is it actually clear to the other person what it is you wish to say? If you were the other person, would *you* understand?
3. Avoid using any words or phrases that are ambiguous or that could be misinterpreted. Do not say things by implication only.
4. Likewise, if you are unclear about what the other person is saying, clarify it in some way, e.g. by saying you do not understand, asking for a repetition, or repeating or paraphrasing the statement.

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

1. Being assertive means speaking out firmly and clearly. But 'speaking out' is not a matter of the words you choose. Your entire body helps you to assert yourself. Your posture, expression, gestures will create a total impression. Non-verbal messages should serve to reinforce, not cancel out, what you are saying in words.

If you are saying one thing but your face or body is saying something else, it is your body language that will usually be believed.

2. Speak audibly at an appropriate volume: too quiet and you won't get your message across; too loud and you may come across as aggressive.
3. Establish eye contact with the person you are talking to, but be careful not to stare.
4. Sit or stand at an appropriate distance from the other person; if you are too close you will invade their personal space; too far away and you will seem distant.
5. Adapt an open and confident posture.
 - Keep your head up, never looking down at the floor.
 - Arms and legs should not be tightly crossed.
 - Leaning slightly forward and tilting head to one side while you are listening shows you are interested in what the other person is saying.

GUIDELINES TO BECOMING MORE ASSERTIVE

In becoming more assertive a person develops awareness both of WHAT s/he says, and of HOW s/he expresses her/himself.

VERBAL ASPECTS TO BECOMING MORE ASSERTIVE

1. PERSONALISING PRONOUNS

Use 'I' statements rather than 'you' 'it' 'we' 'one'. When a person uses the personal pronoun 'I' s/he is acknowledging that the statement is true of her/his experience and that it may be different from other people's. For example "I find it difficult to get to know people in a large group" is very different from, "You find that it is difficult to get to know people in a large group".

2. CHANGING VERBS

- i) Change CAN'T to WON'T where CAN'T isn't an appropriate restriction.
This change of verb encourages a person to take responsibility and to be aware of what s/he can and can't realistically do and that s/he can make a positive choice when s/he decides s/he will or will not do something.
- ii) Change NEED to WANT and differentiate between NEED and WANT.
This change of verb encourages a person to be realistic and responsible about what s/he needs and wants, and to be clear about the difference.
- iii) Change HAVE TO to CHOOSE TO and SHOULD into COULD.
These changes in verbs acknowledge that a person makes a choice about what s/he does and is therefore responsible for the choice. This realisation for a person that s/he has choices is an important part of her/him becoming more assertive.
- iv) Change KNOW to IMAGINE when a FACT is a FANTASY.
Often a person states that s/he knows something about another person when in fact it is based on fantasy. It is important for a person to differentiate between what s/he knows, imagines, feels and thinks when making clear and assertive statements.

NON-VERBAL ASPECTS TO BECOMING ASSERTIVE

1. EYE CONTACT

How a person looks at someone conveys how s/he feels about her/himself and what s/he is saying.

It is a powerful self assertion to look someone directly in the eye. A person will often give her/his power away by looking away. When a person looks directly at who s/he is talking to s/he communicates that s/he is alert and present in her/himself.

2. POSTURE

How a person stands or sits also communicates how s/he feels about her/himself and what s/he is saying.

When a person is standing talking to someone or addressing a group of people, it is important that s/he stands with both feet firmly on the ground. This means that s/he is both centred and balanced in her/himself.

3. CHANGING PASSIVE INTO ACTIVE

A person puts her/himself into a passive role when s/he talks of things happening to her/him.

Part of becoming more assertive is to recognise that a person is responsible for the things that happen to her/him. For example: "I allow people to take advantage of me and often feel angry" is different from: "Things keep happening to me that make me feel angry" in which the person blames things/other people for how s/he feels.

4. CHANGING QUESTIONS INTO STATEMENTS

Questions such as "Don't you think ...?" are often indirect ways of stating "What I think is ...". When a person is clear and direct about what s/he is stating, s/he is more assertive with her/himself and others.

ASSERTION AND COMMUNICATION

BEHAVIOUR

Each one of us has a range of behaviours available to use in different situations. There is no such thing as a completely assertive person. However assertive a person may appear to be, you can be sure that in some areas of their life they will experience difficulty in being assertive.

BEING ASSERTIVE

Being assertive does not guarantee that a person will get exactly what they want all the time. This is unrealistic. There are some things over which we have no power, and there are some situations in which one person cannot get exactly what they want without violating the rights of another person. Behaving assertively may mean negotiating a compromise.

BEING ASSERTIVE MEANS

Being assertive means choosing to make a clear request in the first place; being able to say NO when you want to; handling criticism comfortably and effectively; being aware of verbal and non-verbal content of your messages; coping with conflict; feeling confident in situations which are potentially intimidating; giving and receiving compliments.

It can be difficult to assert yourself in a situation over which you have no control, or when faced with a person with more status than you. And it may be difficult to remain assertive in a situation in which you have more power or status than another person. Being assertive means taking the middle course.

POWERLESS

MIDDLE PATH
(assertive)

POWERFUL

Taking the middle path means showing a genuine respect for your own needs, feelings and rights - as well as the needs, feelings and rights of others.

The principle of equality is one of the most important hallmarks of assertive behaviour

POSITIVE COMMUNICATION

GIVING COMPLIMENTS

Being assertive is more than just standing up for your rights. This is important in developing and maintaining relationships, but it is not the only vital element. It is important to be able to take the initiative in expressing liking, and to be positive about expressing your wants and wishes. People have a tendency to take the lead from each other in the way they communicate. Expressing liking and being positive towards other people increases the likelihood of their feeling free to behave positively toward you.

RECEIVING COMPLIMENTS

Compliments and praise are a kind of present. And yet, many people treat them more like letter – bombs than genuine gifts. They wonder why the person is ‘buttering them up’ (presumably to make them tastier when they get eaten?) and assume the compliment is some kind of sweetener meant to prevent them refusing an unpleasant request, or to make it impossible to scold the person giving the praise for breaking a valuable item of furniture.

Other people have so little self-esteem they cannot believe they are really being complimented, and so they dismiss the compliment as though it were an insult. “This old thing, I’ve had it years” or “You’re only saying that” and so on.

The first response shows a lack of trust in the person giving the compliment, and the second response is equally hurtful, as it seems to say that the person is stupid or insincere in what they are saying. It is like throwing a gift back in the giver’s face.

STATING WHAT YOU WANT

Many people learned very young that they could not have what they wanted e.g. “I want never gets” with the result that, now, they are not really in touch with what they do want and need. Other people believe that their role in life requires them to suppress their own needs and desires in favour of others, e.g. a parent must sacrifice everything for the children. Or, again, there are people who are in touch with their needs and desires, but do not express them, or express them so vaguely /quietly that they are ignored. And some people pretend they want the opposite of what they really want, because they fear the rejection of not getting what they want when they ask for it.

Be specific – ask for what you know you want, and keep to the point. Once you have decided what you want, or want to say, say it clearly and directly. The best way to get exactly what you want is by asking for it directly and specifically.

Stating what you want can give other people the confidence to do the same. It also gives them the chance to satisfy your needs without having to guess what they might be.

PERSISTENCE – THE BROKEN RECORD TECHNIQUE

Having decided what you want and said it clearly and specifically is a good start. However, the other person may not want to hear what you have to say, or may fail to understand you. In this case, keep repeating your statement or request clearly and calmly until it is understood and acknowledged by the other person.

- One of the most important aspects of being verbally assertive is to be persistent and to keep saying what you want over and over again without getting angry, irritated or loud.
- To communicate effectively in a conflict situation, you have to be persistent and stick to the point.
- Non-assertive people tend to get bogged down in excess verbiage and give up easily when someone tells them ‘why’ or gives them ‘reasons’ or uses ‘logic’.
- In learning how to be persistent, the non-assertive person must not be side-tracked into giving reasons or excuses or explanations.
- By practicing speaking as if we were a BROKEN RECORD, we learn to be persistent and stick to the point of the discussion, to keep saying what we want to say, and to ignore all side issues brought up by the person we are asserting ourselves to.
- In using the BROKEN RECORD technique, you are not deterred by anything the other person may say, but keep saying in calm, repetitive voice what you want to say until the other person accedes to your request or agrees to a compromise. You are giving a message to the other person: “I will not be put off - I can do this all day if necessary”.
- Before starting your dialogue, you need to be clear what your main goal is. The BROKEN RECORD technique is used to achieve this. Minor goals may arise during the course of the dialogue for which the BROKEN RECORD technique will also have to be used.

DEALING WITH CONFLICT

The guidelines for dealing with conflict assertively are based on a 'win/win' approach to conflict resolution. This approach involves both people being prepared to work towards a solution to their conflict which is **MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE**.

Conflict arises when a person's thoughts or feelings are antagonistic to another person's thoughts or feelings about an issue. Often people avoid dealing with conflict because they believe there is no way of resolving it. Or they assume that the solution will involve one person winning and the other losing.

Dealing with conflict assertively means working towards both people getting as much as possible of what they want. Often, when two people join together to try and resolve a conflict, they find new ways to sort the situation or avoid polarisation of their differences.

When people deal with conflict assertively, they respect themselves and the other person by keeping a clear picture of them both separate from the issue over which they are conflicting. They are prepared to commit themselves to working out a solution which is agreeable to both of them.

In many situations, where a conflict is resolved by one person 'losing', they will find ways to 'win' in other ways. For example, if two people want to arrange an outing, and eventually agree to go somewhere that one of them does not really want to go to, that person may become ill at the last minute, or moan throughout the day, or find some other way to spoil the outing for the stronger person who has not really considered their wishes.

GUIDELINES FOR DEALING WITH CONFLICT ASSERTIVELY

1. JOIN WITH OTHERS IN WORKING TOWARDS A WIN/WIN OUTCOME

Usually when people are in conflict, they feel as if they are against one another, rather than with one another. This tends to lead to non-assertiveness or aggression and to 'win/lose' ways of dealing with the conflict. When two people join with each other to resolve the conflict, they respect each other and the differences between them, and are prepared and committed to work towards an outcome which is mutually acceptable.

2. KEEP A CLEAR PICTURE OF YOURSELF AND THE OTHER PERSON SEPARATE FROM THE ISSUE

When people are in conflict they often confuse themselves by mistakenly identifying with the people involved with the issue. This can lead to disrespectful and insulting behaviour.

3. MAKE CLEAR 'I' STATEMENTS

Avoid blaming the other person, or accusing them of being responsible for your feelings. Making clear 'I' statements means you take responsibility for your own feelings.

4. BE CLEAR AND SPECIFIC ABOUT YOUR PERCEPTION OF THE CONFLICT AND WHAT OUTCOME YOU DESIRE

When both people define and share their perception of the conflict and their desired outcomes, both have the opportunity to hear and understand the other person, and to be heard and understood themselves.

5. TAKE ONE ISSUE AT A TIME

Avoid confusing one issue with another or using examples from the past to illustrate your point. Using the past can lead to distortion and manipulation. The other person may have forgotten the incident or remember it differently. You may get sidetracked a long way from the matter in hand.

6. LOOK AND LISTEN TO EACH OTHER

Looking at and listening to one another shows that you are prepared to deal directly with one another and with the issue under discussion, and that you are willing to consider the other person and their point of view.

7. ENSURE THAT YOU UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER

If you are unclear and confused about the issue, ask open questions and paraphrase back what you think you hear. For example: “Do you mean ...?” or “Can you be a bit more specific about what it is that makes you feel like that?” or “So what you’re saying is ... is that right?”

8. BRAINSTORM CREATIVE WAYS OF SORTING OUT THE CONFLICT

Brainstorming can be helpful when both people are stuck in their feelings. Make a list of all the possible and perhaps even some seemingly impossible ways forward. Go through it with each other and see if there is any way in which you can sort it out.

9. CHOOSE A MUTUALLY CONVENIENT TIME AND PLACE

Sort out conflict at a time which is convenient and in a place where both people feel comfortable – preferably neutral ground. It is a good idea to agree the amount of time you are prepared to spend on the issue, and stick to it.

10. ACKNOWLEDGE AND APPRECIATE ONE ANOTHER

Acknowledge and appreciate one another for who you are and what you do, separate from the issue causing conflict, and work towards a ‘win/win’ outcome together.

DEALING WITH CRITICISM

Criticism is commonly used to manipulate people by making them feel guilty. Criticism may be direct or implied.

The usual technique is to set up an arbitrary right/wrong ethic which fits the situation, and then attack the person for failing to conform to that ethic. E.g. “you’ve sat there all day just reading that book” (there is a limit to how much reading any good person does in a day, and you have exceeded that limit).

The assertive skill designed to deal with criticism is called FOGGING.

FOGGING (or fielding the response) enables you to:

- ... respond to what is said without getting ‘hooked’ by the criticism into defending yourself with either logic or reason, e.g. “I’ve had breakfast, lunch and tea, and had a couple of snoozes. I haven’t sat and read all day” or making a counter attack, e.g. “Well, you read War and Peace every weekend for a year”. This either validates their code of ethics, or sets up a new one of yours.
- ... receive criticism without feeling guilty and without losing your self-esteem.
- ... sift the criticism and decide for yourself how much to accept and how much to reject.

The term ‘fogging’ means acting like a fog bank, which offers no resistance, and yet remains unmoved by heavy objects, like lorries, hitting it head on.

‘Fielding the response’ describes catching it and throwing it away in one movement, as a fielder might do in a game of cricket. When ‘fogging’ you can:

- ... agree with the truth of what is said, e.g. “This room is a mess.” “Yes, it is untidy, isn’t it?”
- ... agree with the probability, e.g. “You’re so lazy, you’ll never be millionaire.” “You’re probably right, I may not make as much money as I could.”
- ... agree with the possibility, e.g. “If you don’t pull your socks up, you’ll find yourself out of a job.” “You may be right.”
- ... agree with the generality, e.g. “If you stay out late, you’ll ruin your health.” “You’re right, my health will suffer if I don’t get enough sleep.”
- ... agree with as much of the truth as you can, e.g. “You’re dense.” “I agree I often do stupid things.”
- ... agree that that’s the way they see it, e.g. “Yes, I can see you might think that about it.”

You may decide to deny the criticism totally and affirm yourself OR you may choose to ask for a delay, e.g. “I don’t want to discuss this now” OR “Please don’t criticise me while I’m driving” OR set other limits, e.g. “I don’t want you to mention that ever again to me.”

NEGATIVE ASSERTION is another useful skill for handling criticism. By agreeing with the truth of a criticism without being demolished, you can be less defensive and more accepting of yourself, e.g. “Yes, while it appears I am being selfish, I think it’s important to acknowledge my needs and put myself first sometimes.”

The last skill for dealing with criticism is:

NEGATIVE ENQUIRY – which is the process of prompting the person to say more about what is bothering them about your behaviour. This enables you to judge whether the criticism is constructive, and whether you will be influenced by it, or whether it’s manipulative and to be ignored. It allows the other person to express honest negative feelings directly and leads to a general improvement in communication, e.g. “What is it about my television watching that upsets you?” or “Does the mess in here upset you?”

GUIDELINES FOR DEALING WITH CRITICISM ASSERTIVELY

1. Listen carefully to the criticism, don’t become defensive and reject it, or argue with the other person about it.
2. Ask yourself whether the criticism is:
 - a) valid
 - b) invalid
 - c) a put-down
3. If the criticism is generalised, ask the critic to be more specific, e.g. “I’m not sure what ‘too bossy’ means to you, could you give me some examples of things I’ve done that you think were too bossy?”
4. If you think the criticism is valid, acknowledge that it is true. Thank the other person for giving you the criticism and decide whether or not you will change your behaviour as a result of the criticism, e.g. “You’re right, I do often like to sit quietly when we are together. Thank you for telling me. I didn’t realise it bothered you, before.”
5. If you think the criticism is invalid, say so and assert yourself positively (affirm yourself), e.g. if someone says you’re careless about your work, say “No, that’s not true. I usually take a lot of care over my work.”
6. If you think the criticism is valid, but is in the form of a put-down, acknowledge that it is true, and challenge the put-down and assert yourself positively, e.g. If someone says, “Typical of you, you’re always so careless about your work.” You might reply “Yes, I have been careless today, but that isn’t typical of me, I’m usually very careful about my work and I don’t like you saying I’m not.”
7. If you think the criticism is invalid, and is in the form of a put-down, say that you disagree with the criticism. Challenge the put-down and assert yourself positively, e.g. “No, that isn’t true. I did take care over this piece of work. I always am careful in my work and I don’t like you saying I’m not.”

RECEIVING CRITICISM

Step one: be sure to listen carefully to what is being said.

Step two: check that you understand; if not, ask for an example.

Step three: avoid the old conditioned responses:

- a) direct aggression – denying it vehemently
- b) indirect aggression – saying nothing, sulking
- c) passivity – believing it is all true

Step four: decide on the truth of the criticism i.e. is it:

- a) Completely true?
- b) Partly true?
- c) Wholly untrue?

When the criticism is completely true:

Say so clearly: “Yes, I agree, I am lazy.”

Explain how you feel: “I feel bad about it.”

Enquire how your behaviour affects others: “Does it make things difficult for you?”

When the criticism is partly true:

Agree with the part that is true: “You’re right, I can be irresponsible sometimes ...”

Deny the rest: “But I’m usually a sensible person.”

When the criticism is wholly untrue:

Reject the criticism firmly: “No, I don’t agree, I’m not stupid ...”

Add a positive personal statement: “I’m an intelligent woman/man ...”

Ask why they think this: “What makes you think that?”

Step five: Consider what you have learnt from the criticism. Decide if you want to alter your behaviour as a result.

REMEMBER:

Avoid hanging on to it – let it go !

GIVING CRITICISM

This needs to be done constructively. Avoid making vague insinuations or direct personal attacks.

- Step one: Talk positively to yourself. Acknowledge that the other person has the right to be treated with respect.
- Step two: Choose the time and the place – ensure privacy.
- Step three: Avoid vague generalised statements: “This typing is a real mess.” Make clear, specific statements instead, e.g. “When I checked my letters I found several spelling mistakes.”
- Step four: Express how you feel, e.g. “I feel anxious about discussing this with you. However, when I checked my letters I found ...”
- Step five: At this stage it is important to open up the discussion by asking for the other person’s point of view, e.g. “Why do you think this is happening?” and how the situation could be resolved, e.g. “How can we sort this out?”
- Step six: State clearly what the outcome of their new behaviour will be. If you have reached an agreement it will be positive, e.g. “I’m sure this will really improve the image of our department.”
- If there is no agreement you will need to spell out what you want to happen and what the negative consequences will be, e.g. “I’d like you to check all your letters before they come to me. if there is no improvement in your work by the end of the month, I’ll have to discuss it with the human resources department.”
- Step seven: Summarise the points that you have agreed on, ending with a positive comment.

REMEMBER

Putting off giving criticism only prolongs the agony !

THE COMPASSION TRAP

Definition: A sense of obligation that you should put everyone else's needs before you own all of the time.

For Example:

- Do you feel guilty when you pass a person with a collection box?
- Do you feel you are bothering people who appear to be already over worked e.g. doctors, nurses, you boss, shop assistants, and so on?
- Do you accept invitations to parties you do not enjoy simply because the invitation is delivered by a friend or neighbour?
- Do you resent being bothered by family and friends because you are good at, e.g. electrical work, can sew, can sort out car problems, or are able to drive, etc?
- Do you wonder why everyone feels they have the right to burden you with their problems and take up your time?

... Then welcome to the compassion trap.

For instructions on how to deal with these situations, turn to the section on saying 'NO'.

Don't think that you have to say 'YES' to any of the above at any time if you don't want to. you can say 'NO' to people and situations at any time.

REMEMBER, YOUR FEELINGS AND YOUR TIME ARE ALSO IMPORTANT

SAYING 'NO'

Saying 'NO' can be tremendously difficult for some people. There are many different reasons why people find it so hard. Some people just like to please others and feel that saying 'NO' would be an unwelcome response. On the other hand, some people are just unthinking or unrealistic about what they are able to deliver. Whatever the reason, some individuals find saying 'NO' impossible.

If someone's first reaction is to say 'NO' then it is important for them to think about why they want to say 'NO'. If they believe it to be the right response then they should find a way to say it as directly as possible without making excuses and beating about the bush, or giving long-winded explanations.

The key to an assertive 'NO' is to remember that you have the right to say 'NO' without feeling guilty.

Saying 'NO' firmly and reasonably is quite acceptable to most people; they respect us more when we are honest with them, rather than beating about the bush or agreeing to a request - only to let them down later.

It can be helpful for you to think about the kinds of things you find it hard to say 'NO' to – and also what kind of people you find hard to refuse.

- Is it doing a favour for friends?
- Taking on extra work from a senior person?
- Giving money to doorstep callers?

How often have you resented the time you've spent doing something for someone else that you really did not want to do in the first place?

There are a variety of reasons why some people are reluctant to say 'NO' when asked to do something that they really do not want to do.

- Some are consumed by guilt
- Some are intimidated by the chance of an aggressive response
- Some people have a desire to be well thought of – no matter what the cost
- Some think that it may build up resentment
- Some may think that circumstances or a relationship gives them a moral obligation

Saying 'NO' becomes easier with practice and saves a lot of worry and lack of self-respect later.

SUBMISSIVE APPROACH TO SAYING 'NO'

- ❑ Saying 'YES' when you would really rather say 'NO' or when your own judgement tells you that it is better to say 'NO'.
- ❑ Avoiding a decision and letting it slide, until, in the end, you have to co-operate anyway because there is 'NO' time to arrange for someone else to do it.
- ❑ Initially managing to say 'NO' but doing it over apologetically and being talked round.
- ❑ Having agreed, not having the time to carry out the request, and letting the other person down after all.
- ❑ Carrying out a request badly, late, or with bad grace, full of grumbles or sulks, complaining behind the scenes.

MANIPULATIVE APPROACH TO SAYING 'NO'

- ❑ Trying to make the other person feel guilty for asking.
- ❑ Persuading the other person to seek an alternative (with charm, flirting, etc).
- ❑ Avoiding making a direct refusal, side stepping, blustering with lots of lengthy excuses - hoping the other person will give up.
- ❑ Not taking responsibility for the decision, citing someone else's disapproval, or quote policies.
- ❑ Making veiled threats or indirectly putting down the other person for asking.

AGGRESSIVE APPROACH TO SAYING 'NO'

- ❑ Refusing for the sake of being difficult or to get the better of someone – or to retaliate for their having said 'NO' to you in the past.
- ❑ Using words and a tone of voice which demonstrates an inappropriately high strength of feeling or which puts the other person down or attacks them.
- ❑ Displaying a lack of respect for the other person's right to ask for what they want.

ASSERTIVE APPROACH TO SAYING ‘NO’

- ❑ Take time to decide exactly what you really do want.
- ❑ Take into account your gut reaction and don’t be bulldozed into making hasty decisions – take time to make up your mind.
- ❑ Make sure you have all the information you need before you make a decision – ask for more information.
- ❑ If you decide to turn down the request, remember that you are only turning down the request, not rejecting the person.
- ❑ Make a short clear statement that shows you are firmly but gently turning down the request.
- ❑ Persist if necessary.

SAYING ‘NO’ ASSERTIVELY

Keep your reply short

Avoid long rambling justifications and apologies.

Take responsibility – avoid using “I can’t”

It sounds like an excuse – gives the other person ammunition for arguing that you can, e.g.
“I can’t come tonight – I’ve got to do my ironing – I can’t leave it any longer.”

“Oh, that’s no problem – bring it with you – I’ve just got one of those fancy new irons.”

Acknowledge the person who asked

“Thanks for asking me, Louise, but I really don’t feel in the mood for going out tonight.”

Ask for more time

You don’t have to give instant responses to requests, e.g. “can I think about that?”

Tell the other person what your needs are

Remember – you are not rejecting the person – only the request. There is no law that says you must feel guilty.

REMEMBER YOUR RIGHTS!

- ☺ You have the right to say ‘NO’ without feeling guilty.
- ☺ You have the right to consider your own feelings and respect other’s feelings.

Now, think of 3 requests that have come up recently for you:

One request which you were more than happy to agree to:

.....
.....

One request to which you wanted to say ‘NO’ but said ‘YES’

.....
.....

One request to which you had no problem saying ‘NO’

.....
.....

‘NO’ is one of the shortest words in the English language – yet for some people, it’s one of the most difficult to say !

However ...

By not saying ‘NO’ we stand a risk of building up resentment.

In many ways, a reluctance to say ‘NO’ can lead to greater difficulties than actually saying ‘NO’.

Say ‘NO’ not ‘MAYBE’ if that is what you mean.

Don’t ramble on – avoid phrases like:

- Normally I would love to ...
- I hope you don’t mind if ...

If you mean ‘NO’ then that is what you should say

Does this situation sound familiar to you ?

Someone asks to borrow your car. You don't want that person to have the car so you quickly think up a reason to refuse the request, e.g. *"I'm very sorry, normally you could borrow it, but I've booked it in for a service that day"* OR *"I would, but it's only insured for me to drive"*.

Once you have got over the initial relief of getting out of a tight spot, you are left with a feeling of unease, because it is cheating yourself to behave in such a way.

It is not a good feeling to lose your self-respect in order to save face.

Think what you might do if the other person responds with:

"Well, you will have your car back the following day – I'll borrow it then if you don't mind"
(remember, you already said *"normally you could borrow the car"*).

OR they may respond with:

"That's ok, my insurance will cover me to drive your car."

It's perfectly reasonable to say "I NEVER LOAN MY CAR TO ANYONE."

The key to an assertive 'NO' is to remember that you have the right to say it without feeling that you have the need to justify it or feel guilty.

LET'S EXPLODE SOME MYTHS ABOUT SAYING 'NO'

Saying 'NO' is mean, uncaring and selfish.

Saying 'NO' is petty and small minded.

Saying 'NO' directly is blunt and rude.

Saying 'NO' will only make others feel hurt and rejected.

Ask yourself ...

Is it assertive to feel you have to put someone else's needs before your own?

Is it assertive to let someone else decide what is and what is not important to you?

Is it assertive to give an ambiguous indirect message about what you want and how you feel?

Is it assertive to avoid hurting someone else's feelings at all costs?

NO!

IDENTIFYING SITUATIONS FOR SKILLS PRACTICE

1. Make a list of ten situations in which you would like to be more assertive. The situations can be taken from any area of your life, and be with anyone you have contact with: friends, relatives, parents, partners, acquaintances, or strangers.
2. Next to each situation, write down how you behave now. Are you passive, aggressive, manipulative? Perhaps in one situation you may initially be passive and then change to become aggressive.
3. Look through your list and choose the one you think you would find it easiest to handle assertively. Perhaps you can already be assertive in that situation sometimes - rate that number one. Now find the one you feel is the most difficult and troublesome - rate that number ten. Now grade the whole list from 1 – 10 as to the likelihood of your being assertive in such a situation.

If you cannot manage to find ten, or if you find that most of your list is bunched together around the top or bottom, that is not very important. The main thing is to have a range of items on your list to provide a basis for working.

BEWARE:

Beware of jumping in at the deep end. The most difficult situations are the ones you most want to deal with – the ones that have been a source of irritation and upset for the longest. But any long-standing problem usually involves a relationship with someone who is important to you – maybe someone at work, your partner, a parent or close friend. It is difficult to be clear when the situation is emotionally loaded e.g. you may think you simply want to ask your teenage daughter/son to stop spending hours on the phone, when actually you are sad they're growing away from you.

AND:

Because you can manage a problem in a role-play situation, there is no reason to suppose you are ready to handle it in real life – keep practicing, and it will become easier.