

“Learning to become Assertive”

OBJECTIVE: To teach children how to be assertive and self-confident

SKILL: Assertive Expression



- Video
- Exercise Sheets
- Counsellor Interaction

CORE LEARNING

Assertiveness is core strength in many areas of life.

What is Assertiveness?

Assertiveness is the ability to stand up for yourself and to say how you feel when you need to. It includes:

- Expressing your own opinion and feelings.
- Saying "no" without feeling guilty.
- Setting your own priorities i.e. choosing how you spend your time.
- Asking for what you want.
- Being able to take reasonable risks.
- Choosing not to assert yourself at times when you feel it would be better not to say anything.



What problems result from not being assertive?

- You say "yes" to requests for favours from your friends and relatives, no matter how unfair the requests are.
- You are afraid to confront people when real pressing issues

present themselves. E.g. like being given the wrong food at the school cafeteria and not being able to say anything.

- You have difficulty expressing positive feelings i.e. giving compliments.
- You fear being criticised by others.
- You fear people in authority or people who you perceive as better or different



People who do not assert themselves don't get what they want and also feel bad about themselves. They may go over a situation in their mind time and time again thinking, "Why didn't I say that?" or "If only I'd done this". This can lead to feelings of blame, depression and anxiety. People who aren't assertive often have "LOW SELF ESTEEM"

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT BEING ASSERTIVE

The main reason for unassertive behaviour is a fear of what might happen if you are assertive. What do you fear might happen if you did stand up for your rights? You may fear that you would feel extremely guilty or anxious after asserting yourself. These fears are usually based on false beliefs about assertiveness. Let's have a look at some of these myths.

1. I'm only being selfish if I say what I want

All you are doing by being assertive is making your own needs just as important as everyone else's. It is important for your own wellbeing as well as helpful for other people as well. You are not doing anyone a favour by letting people take you for granted or get whatever they want from you.

Here is another example of how it can help other people. Supposing you were watching a movie at the theatre and the person behind you was talking all the time. By politely saying something like: "excuse me, would you mind not talking while the movie is on", you would be helping both yourself and the people around you. Note that this is quite different from an aggressive comment like "Why don't you shut up!" which is only likely to lead to an argument. Being assertive is respectful not rude.

2. If I stand up for myself the other person will become upset and angry!

This sounds like you think other people aren't fair or unreasonable. Remember, you are only asking to be treated as an equal and not making big demands. Most people will recognise this and accept your point of view. In fact, you may be surprised how easily they agree with you.

3. People won't like me if I say what I want!

Think of the people you know who are assertive. Do you think any less of them for that? The chances are that you respect them more for being assertive. People are likely to think more of you if you assert yourself because they know where they stand with you. People like seeing strength and assertiveness in others.

4. I feel too anxious or scared to start being assertive!

This is something of a vicious circle. Being assertive for the first time is always hard but it becomes easier after that. When you keep using it, it becomes part of your personality.



Things to consider when being Assertiveness

- 1) **Pinpoint Problem areas** -When do you find it hard to stand up for yourself? It is

harder around certain types of individuals (authority, teachers, coaches, kids you think are cool, girls, boys etc....

- 2) **Practice- practice, practice-** Rehearse what you can/will say when confronted with a situation. Yes, it is difficult to anticipate what might happen but you can rehearse multiple possibilities and then plan what you might say should it happen.
- 3) **Go into the situation-** You may feel nervous beforehand but this is quite natural. Try and keep to what you have planned to say even if the conversation doesn't quite go as you expected. And remember, you can only do your best. After it's all over ask yourself how you did. What things did you do well? What could be improved upon? Give credit to yourself where it is due and learn as much as you can from what happened to apply to the next time.



TECHNIQUE FOR BEING ASSERTIVE

1. Use "I MESSAGES"- An I message is communicating to someone from an "I" perspective. We use the word I instead of you. The goal of assertiveness is to say what you need to say in a manner so the person hears your concerns without feeling attacked by you. In order to do this, it is critical to start all your communication with the word "I" instead of "You".

Why “I”? Because when we use the word I- it removes blaming and pointing fingers. The other person doesn’t feel responsible your feelings but only informed.

E.g. I felt hurt when you said that **vs** You said a very mean thing!

E.g. I didn’t like when you showed up late **vs** You showing up late and that was very rude!

When we use word “I”, it shows that we have respect for ourselves and our feelings. It also shows that our intention is not to hurt the other person, only to inform them about how we are feeling.

2. Share Your Feelings- When we tell people how we feel, we connect with their emotions and their humanness. It helps them understand and sometimes empathize. When we communicate without sharing our feelings, others can’t connect to our pain. Sharing our feelings is critical in being assertive.

E.g. I **felt sad** when you called me a name **vs** Don’t you call me that name again.

E.g. I **felt so jealous** when you were talking about your new friend **vs** I don’t want to hear about your friend.

*****Practice with your counsellor and see the difference it makes when you share your feelings when you are hurt.*

3. Be specific about what the person is doing or saying to hurt you.

Many times we expect people to read our minds as if they were fortune tellers. It is our responsibility to make sure that if we feel hurt by someone else’s actions or words, we be clear and let them know exactly what they did or said to cause us to feel that way.

E.g. I felt sad **when you took the other person’s side** **vs** I felt sad when you weren’t there for me

E.g. I felt disrespected **when you did not give me a choice on the menu** **vs** I felt disrespected when we went out.

4. Tell people what you need- Once we can tell people the problem, we must be willing to give them a chance to make it better. That means, if this same situation should happen again, they need to know how they could react more responsibly. This is

why we have to tell people what we need or want.

E.g. I felt disrespected when you spoke to me like that, I need for you to speak to me more gently please.

E.g. I felt left out when you left me to go hang out with your other friends, I'd like to you to invite me next time to join in.



Read the following scenarios and fill in the blanks

Scenario 1

You are working on a large group project with a classmate. As group leader, you ask her to complete a specific part of the project and she hesitates. After you explain why you think she is the best person to complete this part of the project, she agrees, but then doesn't do it. However, what she does do is leave you a note, but it's too late, you had to complete the part of the project she was assigned by yourself. You think she pretends to agree with you on work assignments, and then purposely leaves messages so she won't have to tell you no face-to face. But you are getting frustrated because you want her to carry her own weight.

What are you feeling: _____

What specifically is she doing or saying to frustrate you? _____

What is it you need or want from this person? _____

Confront her with your I statement _____

Scenario 2

You have been selected as your soccer team captain and are really excited about the new responsibility. As a team, you travel and everyone has certain

responsibilities/jobs that gets rotated among all the players. E.g. filling water bottles, packing snacks, carrying the extra soccer balls. There are some jobs that are really tedious but everyone has to do them at some point. One of the players always gets out of these tough and boring jobs and is always complaining about being sick, or some part of his body hurting so he doesn't have to do his part. At first his excuses seemed legitimate, but now you're almost certain he is making stuff up, and taking advantage of your niceness and the rest of the team.

What are you feeling? _____

What specifically is he doing or saying to frustrate you? _____

What is it you need or want from this person? _____

Confront him with your I statement _____

INSIDE STORY

Jana always wanted to fit in with the crowd. She liked being accepted by people and never wanted to hurt anyone's feelings. When her friends wanted to go to the mall, she would say "sure, let's go". When her friends wanted to wear polka dots on Friday, she would agree and go with whatever everyone else wanted.

Her birthday was coming up in a month and she really wanted to go rollerblading so she starting discussing it among her friends at school. One of her friends commented "rollerblading is so lame, why don't we go over to Fred's chicken palace and have fun there" Afraid to say anything, Jana agreed but felt so bad inside and came home frustrated with herself for not speaking up and telling the others what she really wanted to do.

- 1) When we go along with others and never express our own opinions or thoughts, what happens to our self-esteem? Discuss.
- 2) Was Jana's friend insensitive to offer to go to Fred's chicken palace or was it Jana's responsibility to speak up.
- 3) What could Jana have said if she was trying to be assertive?

Additional Resources
Everydayspeech.com
Youtube.com