



Information Sheet: Assertiveness Techniques

What is assertiveness?

Assertiveness is behaviour which affirms your rights or points of view without either aggressively threatening the rights, opinions or points of view of another person or submissively permitting the other person to ignore you. People who are assertive are able to express their feelings, thoughts, and desires. They know their rights. They can say 'no' without feeling guilty. They decide how to spend their own time. They ask for what they want. Assertive people have control over their anger. This does not mean that they repress their anger; it means that they manage it and express it in a reasonable manner. They enter into and maintain friendships by considering both their own and the other person's needs.

People who do not assert themselves can not only fail to get what is due to them but also tend to feel bad about themselves. This can lead to feelings of blame, depression and anxiety.

How you can help yourself:

If you are not naturally assertive, try using some of the techniques below. Adapt a relaxed posture. Try not to become angry. Look people squarely in the eye - but don't stare!. Keep a calm tone of voice and be polite, firm, clear and unapologetic. These things may feel awkward or difficult: don't worry if you don't get it right first time.

'I' messages: Starting your sentence with 'I' means you are taking responsibility for your feelings and wishes, rather than blaming the other person. The focus is on the other person's behavior, not who they are. An 'I' message includes a request for the person to change the way they behave and why you are asking for this. For example, rather than saying, 'You make me angry because you're a messy pig', practice saying

something like: 'I feel angry when you don't do your share of the washing up. I would like you to wash up so that the kitchen is clean.'

Dealing with requests: When asked to do something, listen to your gut reaction. If you want to say 'yes', do so clearly. If you want to say 'no', say so using the word 'no'. Explain - but do not excuse yourself – there is no need to say sorry or to justify yourself! Acknowledge the person's feelings about your refusal – you are refusing the request, not the person.

Broken record technique: If your 'no' is not immediately accepted, you may choose to use the broken record technique. Make a clear statement. Repeat your statement as often as you need to - without picking up any counter arguments. Finish the conversation.

Accepting criticism: Accept the negative things that you believe to be true about your behaviour. Remember that errors are just errors, mistakes are just mistakes.

Accepting compliments: Just agree in a positive way! Don't qualify your agreement.

How CCL can help:

Talking in confidence to a counsellor can help you to value yourself enough to make potentially difficult behavioural changes more easily. We offer brief counseling (six sessions). Ask your GP or another NHS worker for a referral to our free counseling service.

Other sources of information:

www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/assertiveness.asp offers a handy, downloadable, self-help guide.

www.assertiveness.org.uk has lots of information about different assertiveness techniques.

Books: 'A Woman in Your Own Right: Assertiveness and You' by Anne Dickson and Kate Charlesworth.

'How to be Assertive in Any Situation' by Sue Hadfield and Gill Hasson

