



CNWL Talking Therapies

Assertiveness Workbook



My appointments:

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My main learning points:

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My weekly challenge:

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Crisis numbers:

Out of Hours Urgent
Advice Line: **0800
0234 650**

Samaritans: **116 123**

Being more assertive

Assertiveness is a style of communication whereby you are able to express your beliefs, opinions, thoughts and feelings in an open and honest way that respects the rights and needs of others.

There are three main communication styles:

- **Passive:** Prioritising others' rights and needs over our own.
- **Assertive:** Respecting our rights and needs, and those of others equally.
- **Aggressive:** Prioritising our own rights and needs over others

	Passive	Assertive	Aggressive
General	Compliant, submissive, talks little, vague non-committal communication, puts themselves down, praises others <i>"I don't mind...that's fine....yes alright"</i>	Actions and expressions fit with words spoken, firm but polite and clear messages, respectful of self and others <i>"That's a good idea, and how about if we did this too..." or "I can see that, but I'd really like..."</i>	Sarcastic, harsh, always right, superior, know it all, interrupts, talks over others, critical, put-downs, patronising, disrespectful of others <i>"This is what we're doing, if you don't like it, tough"</i>
Beliefs	You're okay, I'm not Has no opinion other than that the other person/s are always more important, so it doesn't matter what they think anyway	I'm okay, you're okay Believes or acts as if all the individuals involved are equal, each deserving of respect, and no more entitled than the other to have things done their way	I'm okay, you're not Believe they are entitled to have things done their way, the way they want it to be done, because they are right, and others (and their needs) are less important
Eyes	Avoids eye contact, looks down, teary, pleading	Warm, welcoming, friendly, comfortable eye contact	Narrow, emotion-less, staring, expressionless
Posture	Makes body smaller – stooped, leaning, hunched shoulders	Relaxed, open, welcoming	Makes body bigger – upright, head high, shoulders out, hands on hips, feet apart
Hands	Together, fidgety, clammy	Open, friendly and appropriate gestures	Pointing fingers, making fists, hands on hips
Consequences	Give in to others, don't get what we want or need, self-critical, miserable	Good relationships with others, happy with outcome and to compromise	Make enemies, upset others and self, feel angry and resentful

Common misconceptions about being assertive

The main reason for not being assertive is a fear of what might happen if you are assertive. You may worry about feeling anxious or guilty if you stand up for yourself. These concerns are often due to inaccurate beliefs about what assertiveness is.

“I can’t be assertive, it makes me anxious.”

- This can become a ‘vicious cycle.’ Avoiding being assertive can actually increase your anxiety. It might be tough the first few times you try it, but it will become less difficult over time.

“If I am assertive, I will upset the other person or make them angry.”

- If you can calmly explain your point of view, people will mostly be reasonable and view things from your perspective.

“If I ask for what I want, others will think I’m selfish.”

- Remember, being assertive is about respecting our rights and needs, as well as the rights and needs of others. By taking both into account, you are maintaining your wellbeing as well as the wellbeing of others.

“If I ask for something, I won’t be liked”

- It can help to imagine someone else in your position. Would you think badly of someone who has assertively asked for something? It is more likely that you respect their manner and point of view. People will appreciate that you have been clear about your thoughts or feelings.

Skills for being assertive

The ‘I’ Message

Often when we talk to other people about their behaviour we use the word ‘you’ a lot. This can prompt people to be defensive. When talking about situations, state how you feel using ‘I’, for example ‘I feel upset by your behaviour’ rather than ‘you’re acting inappropriately.’

Focus on specific behaviours

In conversations we often generalise out from the specific situation that we are discussing. This can lead us to be led off track and conversations can therefore end without us feeling that we have come to a clear conclusion. Focus on the present moment and stick to discussing the particular situation that you need to resolve.

Have clear outcomes

Sometimes we can enter conversations with others without having thought clearly about our intention and intended outcome. Give yourself time to think about this before you address someone, it can help for you to know when the conversation has reached an end. This also allows you to assess whether the outcome you are asking for meets both of your needs.

Learning to say no

We can learn ways of saying 'No' that don't lead us to think self-critically or feel guilty. Here are some alternatives you can practice using:

- Unfortunately I can't take on anything else at the moment.
- I'm quite busy right now. Perhaps another time.
- I'd like to help you out, but I'm not available at that time.
- No thank you. I'm happy with what I have.

You can build up to these by saying 'I'll have to think about it' to begin with.

Bringing it all together...

It's helpful to have a framework that you can use to get used to how to approach conversations assertively:

Event: What situation are you referring to?

Feelings: Talk about how the event affected your feelings using the 'I' message.

Needs: State what you need (don't presume someone can infer it)

Consequences: Tell the person involved what the consequences are of the outcome for both you and for them.

Helpful tips...

- Keep your communication short and clear.
- Use a calm but firm tone. Be careful not to use any sarcasm or aggression.
- Match your body language with your confident assertiveness (e.g. standing straight and making appropriate, non-aggressive eye contact).
- Don't guess what other people's intentions are. Ask for and then listen to the perspectives of others and find a compromise.
- Point out discrepancies between what was agreed and clarify any misunderstandings (E.g. "You asked me to do A, but now you're

saying B is more important. I just want to check what is most important right now.”).

- If someone makes you uncomfortable, explain to them how their behaviour affects you. This ensures that they are aware of the impact of their actions.
- If you're concerned about how to be calm, but firm, prepare what you would like to say and repeat it until you feel comfortable with how it comes across.
- As a last resort, inform the other person of the consequence if they refuse to change their behaviour. Be wary, as this can come across as threatening.

Sometimes we may feel that being assertive with someone is not going to have the intended outcome as we cannot control how other's respond to us.

Even if this is the case, by trying out strategies of assertiveness, we are able to collect more information about the situation and can feel that we have at least tried to reach a compromise.

Putting our thoughts to the test

Sometimes we can make negative predictions about a situation, which make us afraid of trying to be assertive. In these cases, it can be helpful to create an experiment to test out these thoughts and then see what can be learnt from these experiences.

Situation	
Prediction <i>What do you predict will happen and how will you know if your prediction comes true? Rate how strongly you believe this prediction will come true (0-100%)</i>	
Experiment <i>How would you test this prediction? (Who, what, when, where) What safety behaviours do you need to avoid doing?</i>	
Outcome <i>What happened? Did what your prediction come true?</i>	
Learning Point <i>What did you learn from this experiment? What is the likelihood that your prediction will happen in the future? Rate how strongly you now believe in your initial prediction (0-100%).</i>	