

SOME TIPS ON ASSERTIVENESS

Introduction

There is a big difference between *passive*, *aggressive* and *assertive* behaviour. If we are too passive, we tend to neither ask for nor get what we need. If we are aggressive, we may, but not always, get what we need - but may be trampling on someone else's rights and feelings to get it.

If we are assertive however, we can get what we need without doing either of the above.

Unassertive people in particular may be prone to fall into depressed or stressed states. Learning some assertiveness techniques can help with confidence, self esteem and challenge patterns of behaviour that may be keeping us stuck in depressed, stressed or generally unhappy states of mind.

The Skills of Assertiveness

Here are some techniques you may want to try. Practice slowly, perhaps with smaller issues with friends or housemates and observe the results. Notice whether people are responding to you differently and how this makes you feel. Remember you won't become assertive overnight but build up gradually and experiment a bit.

Use 'I' statements

Be specific. Decide what you want or feel and say so simply, focusing on saying the word 'I'. So, if someone says or does something that hurts you and makes you feel angry, you may want to try saying something like: 'When you say (I'm stupid) that makes me feel (hurt/angry) and I want (you to stop saying that to me.)

If we stick with the word 'I' it can be harder for people to argue - i.e. for them to say something like 'No, you don't feel like that.'

Whereas if we say 'you' (do this and that) it makes it easier for people to argue back, deny their behaviour or simply walk away if they feel attacked or accused.

Repetition (the 'broken record' technique)

You may find yourself in a situation where you are trying to make a point, or say 'No' but the other person seems to be avoiding or ignoring what you say, distracting you with side issues. Choose a phrase which you feel comfortable with and without getting angry or loud, repeat your assertive statement each time the person tries another manipulation to persuade you to change your mind. You don't have to justify yourself either.

For example, if someone tells you 'You are going to work late tonight' you may want to use an assertive response to repeat: 'I can't work late tonight.'

- Don't answer questions
- Don't respond to insults
- Just keep repeating your statement

Broken records (or stuck CD's!) eventually get heard!

Fielding the Response

It is necessary to indicate to the other person that you have heard what they're saying without getting 'hooked' by it. This skill allows you to acknowledge the response, which shows some care for the other person, and still allows you to continue confidently with your own statement, refusal or requests. For example: 'I realise you are disappointed but I still have to refuse' or 'I know you are hurting but I really don't want to continue with our relationship.'

Saying 'No'

Many people do find it difficult to say 'No' and it can take a bit of practice! Think about some situations when you may find it easy or more difficult to say 'No' to friends, family, partners or coursemates. For example, if they want to go out with you when you have work to do, if they want you to take drugs with them, or if they want you to jump over a cliff.

Decide whether what the person has asked you for is reasonable or not. Do you want to do it or not? If you are not sure, you probably want to say 'No.' simply say 'No,' 'No thank you' or 'No, I don't want to'. Don't give reasons or make excuses as this encourages people to argue with you or try to persuade you. You don't have to explain why, the important thing is that you have given your answer and your intention.

If you are genuinely undecided about whether to go along with the other person's request, the assertive thing to do is to say you need some time to think about it, before giving your answer. Allow yourself as much time as you need to feel comfortable with your decision.

Dealing with Criticism

If someone criticises you, ask yourself is it true or not? If it is true, hard as it is, it may help to admit it. It's OK to have faults and to make mistakes, this is what makes you human and enables you to learn. You can also say sorry if that seems right to you.

If the criticism isn't true, say so, keep repeating it if necessary, don't respond to insults, don't get angry, don't criticise them in return or fall into aggressive behaviour.

You may want to pin the following "Bill of Rights" to your wall!

Bill of Rights

1. I have the right to say what I need as a person in my own right
2. I have the right to be treated with respect as an intelligent person
3. I have the right to express my feelings
4. I have the right to express my own opinions and values
5. I have the right to say 'yes' or 'no' for myself
6. I have the right to make mistakes
7. I have the right to change my mind
8. I have the right to say I do not understand
9. I have the right to ask for what I want
10. I have the right not to take responsibility for other people's problems
11. I have the right to deal with others without their approval

Useful Books to Read

Assert Yourself: Simple Steps to Getting What You Want Gael Lindenfield.
HarperCollins

Self-Esteem Bible: Build Your Confidence Day by Day Gael Lindenfield. Element
Books

Feel the Fear and Do it Anyway Susan Jeffers. Rider & Co