

Assertiveness

Department of Medical Psychology



Medical Psychology
Hadley House
Leicester General Hospital
Gwendolen Road
Leicester
LE5 4PW
Tel: 0116 295 4555

Medical Psychology
Oliver Ward
Victoria Building
Leicester Royal Infirmary
Infirmary Square
Leicester
LE1 5WW
Tel: 0116 258 5227

What is assertiveness?

- Assertiveness involves expressing your thoughts, feelings and beliefs clearly and directly in order to get your needs met and being able to reach compromises with others.
- No one is 100% assertive all of the time.
- If you are unassertive a lot of the time in many different situations, it can be a significant source of stress.
- Being assertive means:
 - we are able to ask for what we want from others
 - we can say no to the requests of others
 - we can express personal opinions without feeling self-conscious.

Why are we unassertive?

- We act in an unassertive manner because we have learnt through our experiences to behave that way.
- This can be traced back to our early childhood.
- Children very quickly learn to adapt their behaviour to the kind of response they receive from those around them.
- Children's behaviour is subtly shaped by models they are exposed to.

The effects of being unassertive

- The long-term effects of being unassertive is a growing loss of self-esteem.
- This refers to our own evaluation of ourselves in respect to how competent, significant and likeable we see ourselves as people.
- The more we act in an unassertive way, the weaker our positive sense of identity.

- This can result in a lack of sense of purpose, or a feeling that we are not in control of our lives.
- This ultimately can result in significant symptoms of stress, and internal tension.

Why be more assertive?

- By being more assertive we can improve our confidence, and our self-esteem.
- By stating more clearly what our needs are, we increase the chances that these needs will be met.
- Communicating effectively in relationships is one of the best insulators against symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression.

Standing up for our rights

- Assertiveness training is based on the premise that we are all equal and that we all possess the same basic rights.
- The goal of assertiveness is to stand up for your rights without violating the rights of others.
- A good starting point is to remind yourself of some of these basic rights.
- You have the right to:
 - express your feelings, opinions and beliefs
 - say “yes” and “no” for yourself
 - change your mind
 - say “I don’t understand”
 - simply be yourself, without having to act for other people’s benefit
 - decline responsibility for other people’s problems
 - make reasonable requests of others.

- Remember:
 - an assertive person acts without undue guilt/anxiety
 - assertive people recognize their needs and ask openly and directly for what they want
 - they are not over reliant on the approval of others.

Basic assertiveness skills

1. Body language
 - maintain eye contact
 - adopt an assertive posture (e.g. holding your head up)
 - speak loud enough to be clearly heard
 - use appropriate facial expressions
 - remember to remain pleasant, reasonable and persuasive.
2. Be specific
 - stick to your statement
 - assertively address any response from the other person which might weaken your position
 - use "I" statements
 - the key to assertiveness is to decide what the point is and to state it without unnecessary padding - for example "I feel like an unpaid cleaner, I would like you to help more with the housework"
 - it is important to start with "I" rather than "You".

Broken record technique

- Broken records eventually get heard because it is uncomfortable to listen to them for too long!
- The key to this technique is repetition; it is literally a case of repeating your phrase more times than the other person can come up with counter arguments or excuses.

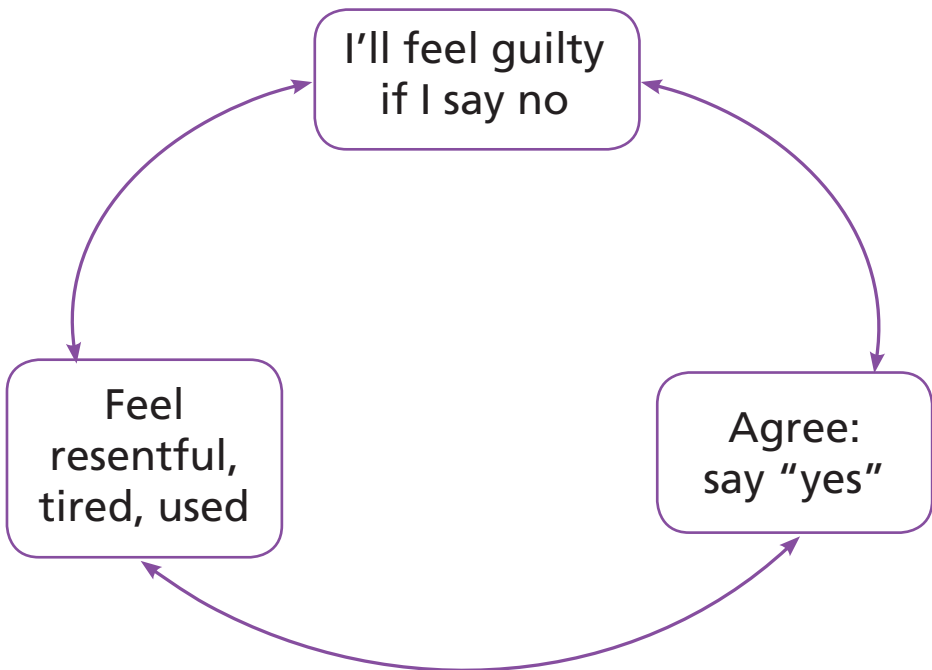
- In order to do this, you need to practice being automatic in your response and not actually answering the point put to you.
- Remember = be persistent.

Fogging technique

- Indicate you have heard what the other person has said, but without getting 'hooked' by what they say.
- Fogging examples:
 - "It may not be usual for you to get complaints, but I still want to exchange these goods."
 - "I know there is a queue of people behind me, but I still want to speak to the manager."
 - "I know you are tired as well but I would still like you to do your share of the work."
- Practising this helps you to overcome your anxiety and defensiveness and continue undeterred.

Saying "no"

- It can very often be difficult to say no to people who make demands of us, and if we say no, we can get caught up in self-critical thoughts leading us to feel guilty.
- To avoid feeling guilty, we just keep on saying "yes" to every request.
- Someone asks us to do something:



- Examples of saying "No":
 - "No, I'm sorry but I really can't take on anything else at the moment"
 - If the person seems to have trouble accepting your "No" then just keep repeating yourself, over and over if necessary.
 - "No. I'm really sorry but I can't at the moment.

Self-help websites

- **Get self help**

Offers self-help and therapist resources for a range of mental health problems, with worksheets, leaflets, models and audio downloads available, including solutions.
<https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/>
- **NHS Choices moodzone**

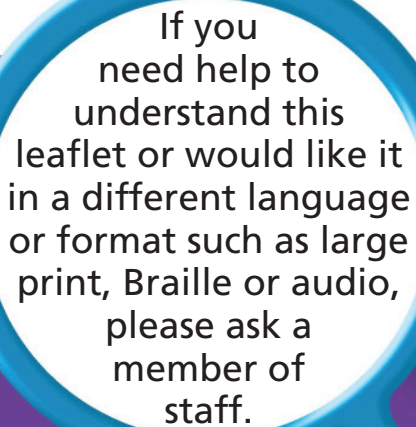
MoodZone focuses on feelings and common life problems which can affect wellbeing (stress, anxiety and depression) and offers advice to help improve mental wellbeing.
<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/Pages/low-mood-stress-anxiety.aspx>
- **NHS Self-help leaflets**

Provides self-help leaflets which have information to help you recognise and understand problems with advice about coping methods and managing psychological issues.
<https://www.nrw.nhs.uk/pic/selfhelp/>
- **Moodjuice**

Provides advice, self-help guides, problem solving handouts and information about organisations/services for those experiencing mental health problems.
<http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/professional/index.asp>
- **Headspace**

Headspace is a service that focuses around mindfulness and meditation to improve aspects of life including mood, relationships and sleep.
<https://www.headspace.com/>
- **Moodcafe**

MoodCafé promotes wellbeing and healthy lifestyle. They offer information about various psychological problems and offers resources, therapies and classes.
<http://www.moodcafe.co.uk/>



If you
need help to
understand this
leaflet or would like it
in a different language
or format such as large
print, Braille or audio,
please ask a
member of
staff.

Date implemented: May 2018
Last reviewed: October 2018
Review date: October 2020
Leaflet No. 492 - Edition 2