Assertiveness Skills
Getting The Balance Right

Designed and facilitated by [blank] on behalf of [blank]

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Course Objectives

After attending this course, participants will:

• Understand the principles and values of assertive communication
• Recognise non-assertive communication styles and their consequences
• Be aware of their own levels of assertiveness in a range of situations
• Understand the barriers to being assertive and how they can be overcome
• Put into practice a range of useful assertiveness techniques
• Have the confidence to respond more assertively, where appropriate, in their professional and personal lives
Table of Contents

What Is Assertiveness? .............................................................. 1
    Getting the Balance Right.................................................. 1

Non-Assertive Behaviour....................................................... 1
    Aggressive ........................................................................ 1
    Passive ............................................................................. 1
    Passive-aggressive ............................................................ 1

Recognising Non-Assertive Communication .......................... 2
    Characteristics of Passive Communication .......................... 2
    Characteristics of Aggressive Communication ..................... 3
    Characteristics of Passive-aggressive Communication ........ 4

Recognising Assertive Communication .................................. 6
    Verbal Assertiveness .......................................................... 6
    Non-verbal Assertiveness ................................................... 6

Why Be Assertive? ................................................................. 8
    The Benefits of Assertiveness ............................................. 8

Barriers To Assertiveness....................................................... 10
    Stress and Anxiety ............................................................ 10
    Limiting Beliefs and Values ................................................. 10
    Low Self-Confidence ........................................................ 10
    Lack of Skills ..................................................................... 10
    Under-Developed Emotional Intelligence ............................. 10
    Negative Risk Assessment ................................................ 10

Recognising Your Hot Buttons .............................................. 12
    Anger Triggers .................................................................. 12
    Anxiety Triggers .............................................................. 12
What Is Assertiveness?

Getting the Balance Right

Assertiveness balances the clear, firm communication of your needs, feelings and opinions with respect and consideration for the other person. It gives you a way of standing up for yourself, while accommodating the other person’s rights, needs and feelings.

Assertiveness gives you the choice to respond to people in ways which avoid aggressive, passive or passive-aggressive behaviour.

Non-Assertive Behaviour

Aggressive

Aggressive behaviour is selfish, dominating and demanding. Aggressive people often devalue the needs of others, discounting their opinions and feelings.

Passive

Passive behaviour is selfless, accommodating and avoids conflict at all costs. Passive people tend to back down quickly and ignore their own rights, needs and feelings in order to appease others.

Passive-aggressive

Passive-aggressive behaviour avoids direct, clear communication and uses insinuation, sarcasm and gossip instead. Passive-aggressive people are often sulky, whiney, negative or uncooperative.
Recognising Non-Assertive Communication

Different kinds of non-assertive communication can be recognised via a number of verbal and non-verbal habits.

Characteristics of Passive Communication

Verbal signs

• Not getting to the point
• Unnecessary apologising
• Too much self-depreciating humour
• Being too polite (“If it isn’t going to interrupt you too much…”)
• Over-empathising (“I know you’re really, really busy, but…”)
• Always seeking approval (e.g. “…if that’s OK?”)
• Over-justifying (“I’m only bringing this up because…”)
• Self-undermining (“I’m probably just being blonde, but…”)
• Under-playing importance (“It’s probably not relevant, but…”)

Non-verbal signs

• Not speaking up
• Avoiding difficult conversations
• Slumping or timid posture
• Avoiding eye-contact or lowering eyes
• Fidgeting hands
• ‘Protecting’ gestures (e.g. hand to face)
• Nervous laughter, pleading smile
• Jokey or ingratiating tone
• Rising or unsteady voice tone
• Speaking too softly or mumbling
• Hesitations, throat-clearings, ums and errs
Characteristics of Aggressive Communication

Verbal signs

• Giving orders ("Just do it!")
• Threats and ultimatums ("You’d better have this on my desk today, or…")
• Insults and put-downs ("Well, I suppose I shouldn’t have expected any better from you…")
• Stating opinions as facts ("That’s never going to work.")
• Making jokes at the other person’s expense
• Racist, sexist or other offensive remarks
• Being judgmental ("Well, you should have called Alicia to check first")
• Demanding justification ("What time do you call this?!")
• Blaming and accusing ("It was your dumb proposal in the first place")

Non-verbal signs

• Losing temper and shouting
• Cold or aggressive tone
• Staring (‘eyeballing’) with narrowed eyes
• Pointing or dismissive hand gestures
• Shoulders set, jutting jaw
• Leaning forward or looming over people
• Invading people’s ‘personal space’
• Overstepping other boundaries (e.g. physical contact)
• Blunt, clipped speech
• Interrupting and talking over people
Characteristics of Passive-aggressive Communication

Verbal signs
- Sarcastic comments (“Yeah, right.”)
- Put-downs of people who aren’t present
- Constantly whining and complaining
- Spreading nasty rumours
- Rubbing it in (“Oh, surprise, surprise! What did I tell you!”)
- Disrespectful comments (“So says Ms High and Mighty!”)
- Emotional blackmail (“I thought we were friends, Damien.”)
- Knee-jerk negativity (“Here we go again, another massive waste of time.”)

Non-verbal signs
- Sneering expression
- Single raised eyebrow (in some cultures)
- Slouched, uninterested posture
- Not paying proper attention (multitasking)
- Turning your back on the other person
- Sarcastic or condescending tone
- Cruel or mocking laughter
**EXERCISE – Small groups:** Watch the video and identify signs of non-assertive communication in the different characters.

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<th>Character</th>
<th>Behaviour type</th>
<th>Signs (verbal/non-verbal)</th>
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Recognising Assertive Communication

Assertive communication can also be identified via verbal and non-verbal habits.

Verbal Assertiveness

- Clear, direct statements. (“I can’t support this proposal”)
- Honest about emotions (“I’m quite frustrated about this”)
- Being accountable (“I realise I may have seemed to approve by not saying something earlier”)
- Constructive feedback (“I think this needs further editing, Nick”)
- Stating opinions as opinions (“The way I see it…”)
- Being unambiguous (“Sorry, no”)
- Active listening (“I’m interested in your perspective on this?”)
- Appropriate empathy (“I realise this isn’t ideal for you”)
- Constructive attitude (“…but what I can do is…”)
- Using assertiveness techniques (covered later in this course)

Non-verbal Assertiveness

- Firm, determined and respectful tone
- Voice raised enough to be heard but not shouting
- Calm, measured speech
- Relaxed, balanced, upright posture
- Open and reinforcing gestures
- Full attention with good eye contact (attentive but not stare-y)
- Authentic, appropriate facial expression
EXERCISE – In threes:

**Observer's Notes**

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<th>Suggested assertive alternative</th>
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