

The Concept of Assertiveness

Walter vom Saal

1. Definitions of assertiveness.

Narrow definition: Assertiveness is standing up for your rights.

Broader definition: Assertiveness is the open, honest, and appropriate expression of your true feelings, needs, and desires.

2. The importance of discomfort or anxiety in under-assertiveness.

Concept of social anxiety.

Under-assertiveness described as related to timidity, shyness, low self-esteem, low self-confidence, social anxiety.

Two major components in under-assertiveness:

- skill level.
- comfort level.

3. Assertiveness different from aggressiveness.

Concept of under-assertiveness, over-assertiveness, appropriate assertiveness.

4. Under-assertiveness may be conceptualized as

A personality dimension (general tendency)

Situational (a situation – specific response)

Note: a person may be assertive in some situations and under-assertive in other situations.

5. Basic techniques of Assertiveness Training.

- a. Discussion of Rights.
- b. Discussion of Options and Consequences.
- c. Awareness of present behavior.
- d. Specification of alternative behavior.
- e. Graded real-life task assignments. (Compare real-life systematic desensitization procedures for the treatment of anxiety.)
- f. Role playing (“behavior rehearsal”).
- g. In Assertiveness Training groups, encouragement and support of group members.

6. Five questions:

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| - Can I <u>ask someone</u> for something? | } | For each of these: |
| - Can I <u>say no to someone</u> who has asked something of me? | } | How often do I do it? |
| - Can I <u>express negative feelings</u> ? | } | How comfortable am I when I do it? |
| - Can I <u>express positive feelings</u> ? | } | Note that almost everyone |
| - Can I <u>initiate conversations</u> ? | } | has difficulty with at least one of these. |

7. Expanded discussion of your rights.

- Starting with the correct attitude: I am worthwhile; I am important; my feelings, needs, and desires are important.

- Your rights:

- a. The right to be treated with respect.
- b. The right to have and express your own feelings and opinions.
- c. The right to be listened to and taken seriously.
- d. The right to set your own priorities.
- e. The right to say NO without feeling guilty.
- f. The right to ask for what you want.
- g. The right to make mistakes.
- h. The right to choose not to assert yourself.

General point: You have the right to be yourself, with your own desires, your own priorities, your own opinions, your own idiosyncrasies, your own strengths and weaknesses.

8. Guidelines for Role Playing (behavior rehearsal).

- a. Identify the present situation:

- who, what, when, where.
- where does the interchange take place?
- who are the other people involved?
- when does the event typically occur?
- what precisely takes place?

- b. Role play the present behavior.

- observe verbal, nonverbal behavior and give feedback.

- c. Discuss options and consequences.

- concept of “expanding your options”: often people get stuck, but there are almost always more options that we first think of.
- brainstorm in group (or talk with friends) to expand options.

- d. Specify goal behavior.

- voice: tone of voice
- rate of speech
 - too slow (pauses)
 - too fast
 - too soft
 - too loud
- saying too much
- body language (posture)
- relaxation: nervous gestures
- eye contact

- e. Role play desired behavior in steps:

- begin with no counter-argument.
- gradually make the situation more difficult.
- observers make suggestions: verbal, nonverbal behavior.
- several short segments with feedback.

9. Other guidelines.

- a. Avoid sarcasm, pleading, whining.
- b. Avoid excuses.
- c. Avoid giving too many reasons.
 - say it simply and clearly.
 - you don't need to justify your feelings or opinions.
- d. Show consideration, respect, and recognition of the other person.
- e. In situations involving criticism;
 - criticize the behavior, not the person.
 - use constructive criticism, not destructive criticism.
 - offer a suggestion.
 - specify desired behavior.
- f. Use "I" rather than "You" statements.
- g. Employ the "no lose" strategy ("I win, you win")
- h. Don't get drawn off the issue (employ the "broken record" technique")
- i. Try reflecting feelings: the process of "active listening."
- j. It's OK to start small. Starting small is better than not starting at all.