



Building Assertiveness Skills

A 4 Module E-Course

I have put together a course that you can do with just email on “Building Assertiveness Skills”. This course contains lots of material I have used with great success in one on one coaching and workshops to help people become more assertive. This course contains some core and some advanced assertiveness skills training. There is theory, there are practical examples, and there are lots and lots of situations for you to try out assertiveness for yourself.

ASSERTIVENESS SKILLS

Being assertive means to stand up for our needs and wants while respecting the self-esteem of others. We stand up for ourselves, we recognise our rights, and at the same time recognise the rights of others. The foundational beliefs of assertiveness are that we both count equally. We are both equally valuable human beings. If you are stressed a lot then learning to be assertive will help a great deal. If you are aggressive then learning assertiveness skills will help you be less aggressive. Many people who are aggressive are that way because they don't want people to walk all over them, but they don't know how to be stand up for themselves and at the same time be nice to others.

When you do this course you will learn:

- The difference between passive, aggressive, passive-aggressive and assertive thoughts and actions
- Tools to think more assertively
- Tools to behave more assertively
- How to say “no” in a nice way
- How to stand up and speak up for yourself
- How to stop apologising when you don't need to
- How to have less stress through being assertive
- How to be less aggressive through learning to be more assertive
- How to complain effectively
- How to give and accept compliments
- How to start, continue, and end conversations easily
- How to deal with demands made on you
- How to receive criticism
- And more.....

You can start the programme at any time. To do this course you only need access to email.

The outline of the 4 module programme is as follows:

Module 1: Module one looks at what assertiveness means. What is the definition of assertiveness? What does assertiveness in practice look like? What does unassertive behaviour look like? Assertiveness is often misunderstood and so we spend quite some time looking at what is passiveness, aggressiveness, passive-aggressiveness, and assertiveness. They are all quite different. By the end of module 1 you should have a very good idea as to what assertive behaviour looks like, and what it isn't. You should also have a very good idea of the situations in which you are either assertive, passive, aggressive or passive-aggressive.

Module 2: Module 2 looks at how we can be assertive in our thinking. Thoughts precede our feelings and our actions. What we think generally always influences how we feel and act, so we start with thoughts, because once we are thinking in an assertive way, it becomes much easier to behave assertively. In fact behaving assertively means we have to start with getting our thoughts right. We examine the thoughts and beliefs of assertive people and unassertive

people. We look at how you can change your thoughts to become those of assertive folks. We look at how you can work on this by using thought diaries.

Module 3: In this module we look at assertiveness in action. What are the behaviours / actions of assertive people? We look at how you can change your behaviour to be more assertive and make use of some behavioural experiments and other techniques for changing behaviour permanently.

Module 4: In module 4 we look at specific instances of being assertive in practice. We look at how to complain assertively when you are unhappy with service you have received. We look at how to deal with demands placed on you. We look at how to give and receive criticism and how to give and receive compliments.

- The work you can do in your [own time anytime during the week](#). Most people complete the course in 4-8 weeks. However there is no time limit. You can take as long as you like. You will need about 3-4 hours a week.
- [There is a certificate available on completion of the course.](#)

Contact: penny.holburn@live.co.za for more information or to book for the course. You can start the course at any time.

Below are 10 pages of extracts from the course material to give you an idea of what the course is like and to see if you want to do the course. The full course material is around 90 pages. Each module is about 20 pages.

Extracts from the Course

Becoming Assertive

The aim of this course is to help you learn the knowledge and skills to become assertive, and to put these into practice so you become skilled in thinking, feeling and acting assertively.

Assertiveness is a way of thinking, feeling and behaving, and is important to be happy and successful in life. Many decades ago it did not matter as much if people were not very assertive. Life was less complicated. You could spend your whole life in one job and be well rewarded for this. Today, if you cannot stand up for yourself,

market yourself, and put yourself forward you are at a disadvantage. From a career perspective you need to be assertive. If you don't others will walk all over you, will get the promotions, will rise to the top of the company, and be far more successful than you.

Lack of assertiveness is also difficult in relationships. Without being assertive we spend our time doing what others want. We feel no one listens to us, hears us, and cares about our needs. In relationships we need to be able to voice our needs and wants in order for the relationship to be healthy and grow.

Assertiveness means we are able to complain appropriately about poor service, instead of fighting with people or just leaving it and feeling the victim. It means we hold others accountable for when they treat us poorly. We insist others respect us, as we respect them. Without being assertive we are likely to be taken advantage of or get the short end of the stick. Although we would like to believe that all people are fair and just, in practice that is not the case. Without being assertive, you cannot stand up for yourself and insist you do get fair and just treatment.

1.1 Definition of Assertiveness

There are a number of different definitions of assertiveness in the dictionary and the psychological literature. The Oxford Dictionary defines assertiveness as: Forthright, positive, insistence on the recognition of one's rights. In other words assertiveness means standing up for your personal rights. It means expressing thoughts, feelings and beliefs in direct, honest and appropriate ways. It is also accepted that by being assertive we respect the right of others to have their own thoughts, feelings and beliefs.

Assertiveness means that I stand up for my wants, needs, and values, in a way that respects the self-esteem of others. It means a willingness to stand up for myself, treat myself with respect in all encounters, and be who I am. Assertiveness also means paying attention to situations and appropriateness. If someone is holding a gun to your head, asserting your rights may not be the best thing to do. In most contexts though, being assertive is generally the most adult and useful way to respond.

Assertiveness concerns being able to express feelings, wishes, wants and desires appropriately. In all interactions with other people, be it at home, at work, with employers, customers or colleagues, assertiveness enables you to express yourself in a clear, open and reasonable way without undermining your own or others' rights. So assertiveness means individuals can act in their own best interests, stand up for themselves without too much anxiety, and express feelings honestly in accordance with their personal rights and without denying the rights of others.

It means tactfully, justly and effectively expressing our preferences, needs, opinions and feelings.

Being aggressive means being self-centred, inconsiderate, hostile and arrogant, and is not being assertive. Aggressive people usually stand up for their rights while trampling all over the rights of others. Being passive – being weak, compliant, self-sacrificing - is also not being assertive. In this case you are not standing up for your rights. Wanting to be nice and not cause trouble doesn't work in the long run because your needs are not met. If you don't speak up about a situation you don't like, nothing can be done to change it.

People who are passive - verbally withholding, or overly deferential—generally don't (and *can't*) get their basic relational needs met. So they end up feeling frustrated, misunderstood, and unfulfilled. Individuals who are more *aggressive* than assertive similarly wind up feeling "cut off" from others, despite being much better at getting others to do their bidding. But through insistent "bullying" demands and projecting the message that their own (ego-centred) needs are unquestionably more vital, more valuable, than anybody else's, they eventually alienate those around them.

When we do not stand up for ourselves we wound ourselves and lower our self-esteem. When we are unassertive we cheat ourselves and lose self-respect because we subjugate ourselves to others. When we are unassertive we are dishonest and we hide who we really are. When we are not assertive we invite in submissiveness or aggressiveness which threatens, if not destroys, relationships.

If you are in a relationship of any kind (work, romantic, familial), based on your being a "doormat", "slave", "yes-person", you build up resentment and may resort to subtle manipulation to get what you really want. The

"you owe me's" build up each time we acquiesce and eventually we want back what we feel is owed to us. And often the result is an explosive outburst or equally damaging passive-aggressive actions.

Assertiveness can help you overcome shyness, passivity, stress and even anger. Many people facing these challenges in their lives benefit considerably from learning to be assertive.

Exercise:

Based on what we have discussed so far, how assertive would you say you are? On a scale of 1 – 10 where 1 means completely unassertive and 10 means completely assertive, what score would you give yourself.

Write down why you gave yourself that score.

Unless you are completely assertive in all situations, write down some of the consequences of you not being assertive in situations.

1.2 To be assertive means:

- To speak up for myself. To ask for what I want and need. To express my opinions and feelings.
- To make requests. You may not get everything you ask for, but you still ask for what you want, or what you don't want.
- To express unhappiness when your rights are being ignored.
- To express negative emotions (complaints, resentment, criticism, disagreement) and the desire to be left alone.
- To be able to say no and refuse requests.
- To show positive emotions (joy, pride, liking someone, attraction) and to give compliments.
- To ask why and question authority or tradition, not to rebel but to assume responsibility for asserting your share of control of the situation — and to make things better.
- To initiate, carry on, change and terminate conversations comfortably.
- To share your feelings, opinions and experiences with others.
- To deal with minor irritations before your anger builds into intense resentment and explosive aggression.
- To treat myself with respect in all situations.
- To think for myself and stand by what I think
- To take responsibility for my life
- To live authentically
- To accept a "we both count equally" attitude
- To refuse to fake who I am in order to be liked
- To be kind without being self-sacrificing
- To accept the challenges of life
- To encourage others to be open and honest about their views, wishes and feelings.

Exercise:

Which of the above do you find yourself doing on a regular basis.

Which of the above do you struggle with?

1.3 What does it mean to be unassertive? (includes passive & aggressive actions)

- I avoid expressing my needs, wants and values; I hide who I am.
- I please, placate or manipulate in order to belong.
- I don't ask questions when things would be easier for me if I did.
- I don't take responsibility for my life and actions.
- I am self-sacrificing and subtly remind others of this all the time.
- I push others out the way or knock them over; I have to get my own way at all costs.
- Others have to agree with me; I uphold my rights while ignoring the rights of others.
- I challenge just for the sake of challenging; I am aggressive or abusive.
- I belittle, demean, or hurt other people in words or actions.

Exercise:

Which of the above are ways in which you tend to behave

Having looked at some examples of assertiveness and some of unassertiveness, complete the following two exercises. These exercises highlight that often we are assertive in some situations and not in others.

In which situations do you find it easy to be assertive?

In which situations do you find it difficult to be assertive?

1.4 What does it mean to be passive?

Passive means I don't stand up for myself. It means I comply with the wishes of others even if they go against my own wishes. Many people adopt a passive response because they have a strong need to be liked by others. Such people do not regard themselves as equals because they place greater importance on the rights, wishes and feelings of others. People who are passive often have a low self-esteem, and by acting passively, they just reinforce their low self-esteem. It is a vicious cycle. I don't stand up for myself because I have low self-esteem and see others as more important and valuable than myself, and so others treat me how they want to. That in turn reinforces a low sense of self-worth and so self-esteem stays low or gets even lower. Being passive results in failure to communicate thoughts or feelings and results in people doing things they really do not want to do in the hope that they might please others.

Not only are people who are passive excessively compliant, they also hold back, don't make decisions, and allow others to take all the responsibility. This reinforces a victim status. People who are passive feel and act helpless, and through giving their power to others, their helpless and victim sense is reinforced and strengthened.

A classic passive response is a person saying "yes" to requests when they actually want to say "no". For example: "Do you think you can find the time to clean out the kitchen cupboard today?" A passive response would be: "Yes, I will do it." (When the person still has to do the shopping, filing, clean the windows, etc., and actually doesn't have time for it). An assertive response would be: "No I cannot do it today as I have so many other chores to do."

If you are a passive person, you may find you tend to be loaded up with tasks at home or work or both.

When you respond passively, you present yourself in a less positive light or put yourself down in some way. If you constantly belittle yourself in this way, you will come to feel inferior to others. While the underlying causes of passive behaviour are often poor self-confidence and self-esteem, in itself it can further reduce feelings of self-worth, creating a vicious cycle.

Some of the thoughts, feelings and behaviours typical of passive people

- There is nothing I can do about my feelings.
- I avoid conflict, I don't like conflict.
- When others resist what I am saying, I give up
- I cannot help the way I am
- I cannot control my feelings and actions
- I have no influence on others
- If someone disagrees with me I will change my mind and agree with them
- When people don't think the same way as me I am sad
- I will always compromise when others have different views to mine
- No one wants to know what I feel
- No one is interested in my opinions
- My thoughts and feelings don't count
- I always need to justify what I do
- I need to give long explanations for my actions
- If others treat me badly I must just accept it
- I cannot say "no" – it would not look good
- I cannot say "I don't know" – it would look weak and I would appear pathetic
- I need to always put others before me
- Thinking about my own needs is selfish and bad
- I have to participate when I am asked to, even if I don't like the activity and don't want to participate
- I have to reply immediately when asked something
- If I said I would do something I have to do it, I cannot back out of it
- I am not allowed to make a mistake.
- If I make mistakes then I am weak and useless

Usually people have a combination of approaches. Very few people are always passive all the time. Sometimes they may be passive, sometimes they may be aggressive, and in situations they feel comfortable in they may be assertive. So it is possible to have someone who is passive in some situations, assertive in others, and aggressive in yet other situations.

1.5 What does it mean to be aggressive?

Aggressive behaviour is behaviour that doesn't respect the rights and self-esteem of others. Aggressive behaviour fails to consider the views or feelings of other individuals. Those behaving aggressively will rarely praise or show appreciation of others and an aggressive response tends to put others down. Aggressive responses encourage the other person to respond in a non-assertive way, either aggressively or passively.

There is a wide range of aggressive behaviours, including rushing someone unnecessarily, telling rather than asking, ignoring someone, bullying someone, or not considering another's feelings.

It can be a frightening or distressing experience to be spoken to aggressively and the receiver can be left wondering what instigated such behaviour or what he or she has done to deserve the aggression.

Some of the thoughts, feelings and behaviour associated with aggression:

- I cannot control my emotions
- I cannot help the way I am
- I always talk about what you did wrong
- I talk about how you made me feel badly
- I shout and yell
- I have to get my own way
- If someone stands up for themselves I get aggressive with them
- Other people must behave the way I want them to
- Other people must behave the way I tell them to
- I don't take responsibility for my life, I blame and yell at others for messing things up for me
- I always expect others to compromise so we can do what I want to
- I get angry when others have a different opinion to me
- I can express my feelings any way I want to
- I have a right to demand that people explain why they did what they did
- I can treat people any way I want to
- I need to show people who is in charge
- If others don't want to participate in activities I want to do, I make them go along with what I want

- If I ask others a question I expect an immediate answer
- I will only accept answers that I like
- Other people have to have the same opinions as me
- I am always right
- Other people are not allowed to change their minds
- Other people are not allowed to say no to me when I want them to do something
- People should be punished when they make mistakes
- I don't make mistakes; I blame others