COMMUNICATION STYLES

Assertion is a style of communication. We all have learned different styles of communication, as we have adapted to the various situations of our lives. If some of our styles of communication do not work well in our current situation, they can be changed and replaced with new behaviors. Though there are times when it is best to be passive and times when it is best to be aggressive, in most situations it works best to communicate assertively.

DEFINITIONS (from Lange & Jakubowski)

1) Assertion
   a)...standing up for personal rights and expressing thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in direct, honest, and appropriate ways that do not violate another person’s rights.

   b)...The basic message of assertion is: “This is what I think. This is what I feel. This is how I see the situation.”

   c)...The goal of assertion is communication and mutuality; that is, to get and give respect, to ask for fair play, and to leave room for compromise when the rights and needs of two persons conflict.

2) Passivity
   a)...violating one’s own rights by failing to express honest feelings, thoughts, and beliefs and consequently permitting others to violate oneself; or expressing one’s thoughts and feelings in such an apologetic, diffident, self-effacing manner that others can easily disregard them.

   b)...The basic message of passivity is “My feelings don’t matter - only yours do. My thoughts aren’t important - yours are the only ones worth listening to. I’m nothing - you are superior.”

   c)...The goal of passivity is to appease others and to avoid conflict at any cost.

3) Aggression
   a)...directly standing up for personal rights and expressing thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in a way that is often dishonest, usually inappropriate, and always violates the rights of others.

   b)...The basic message of aggression is: “This is what I think - you’re stupid for believing differently. This is what I want - what you want is not important. This is what I feel - your feelings don’t count.”

   c)...The goal of aggression is domination and winning, forcing the other person to lose. Winning is ensured by humiliating, degrading, belittling, or overpowering other people so that they become weaker or less able to express and defend their needs and rights.

IMPORTANCE OF PROCESS

The major impact of interpersonal communication comes not from what we say (content), but from how we say it (process). Assertive content with passive process will communicate passivity. Some examples of important process variables include:

Assertion: Direct but non-invasive eye contact, modulated voice, respect for spatial boundaries, use of illustrative gestures, an erect but relaxed posture.

Passive: No eye contact (or indirect evasive eye contact), soft/whiny/or muffled voice, cringing/or physically making yourself small (hang-dog posture), use of nervous or childish gestures.

Aggressive: Invasive/angry staring-eye contact, loud strident voice, invasion of spatial boundaries, use of aggressive gestures (parental finger), stiff, “muscled up”, posture, towering over others.

IDEAS TO KEEP IN MIND

1. Assertive behavior is often confused with aggressive behavior, however, assertion does not involve hurting the other person physically or emotionally.

2. Assertive behavior aims to equalize the balance of power, not to “Win the Battle” by putting down the other person or rendering them helpless.

3. Assertive behavior includes expressing your legitimate rights as an individual. You have a right to express your own wants, needs, and ideas.

4. Remember: Other individuals have a right to respond to your assertiveness with their own wants, needs, and ideas.

5. An assertive encounter with another individual may involve negotiating an agreeable compromise.

6. By behaving assertively, you open the way for honest relationships with others.

7. Assertive behavior is not only determined by “what you say”. A major component of the effect of your communication depends on “how you say” it.

8. Assertive words accompanied by appropriate assertive “body language” make your message more clear and have more impact.

9. Assertive body language includes:
   a) Maintaining direct eye contact.
   b) Maintaining an erect posture.
   c) Speaking clearly and audibly.
   d) Not using a soft, whiny, or muffled voice.
   e) Using facial expressions and gestures to add emphasis to your words.

10. Your communication style is a set of learned behaviors. Assertive behavior is a skill that can be learned and maintained with practice.
This is a brief introduction to basic assertion skills. Contact the campus Counseling office to arrange group or individual training in these skills.

**ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION: an introduction**

- Assertion skills help you:
  - Stand up for yourself
  - Express feelings directly
  - Improve relationships
  - Give Compliments
  - Give Criticism
  - Make requests
  - Say No / Set Limits

**Assertion Training**

Our Counseling Service offers group and individual assertion training opportunities free of charge to enrolled students. You may also check out books, handouts, and videos on assertive communication from our resource library in 2122 Old Library.

**How To Make an appointment:**

**Walk-in or call 836-5521 to schedule a counseling session or join a counseling group.**

**Location:** 2122 Old Library

Counseling services are confidential and free of charge to UWEC Students and Staff.

**Division of Student Affairs**

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**ASKING FOR BEHAVIOR CHANGE**

One specific type of assertive behavior is a request for behavior change. For example: You may need to ask a room-mate to turn down the stereo so you can study. It is necessary to request that others change behavior that does not work, but it is often difficult for people to make such requests:

1. You have a right to ask for behavior change from others. (They also have the right to refuse.)
2. When you do not ask others to change a problem behavior, you risk allowing the behavior to continue and your relationship to be strained, or waiting until you are “fed up” and starting a fight.
3. Requests for behavior change protect your rights, at the same time they build clear communication and more effective relationships.
4. When asking for behavior change use an “I message” format:
   - **WHEN** ... (objectively describe the other’s behavior)
   - **THE EFFECTS ARE** ... (describe how the behavior concretely effects you).
   - **I FEEL** ... (describe how you feel).
   - **I’D PREFER** ... (describe an alternate behavior you prefer).
   - **OK?** ... (or synonymous request for closure).

You may wish to follow requests for behavior change with statements of logical consequences (“If you turn down the radio when I need to study, I will also make an effort to be considerate of your needs”).

5. Demonstrate assertive body language when asking for behavior change: direct eye contact, erect posture, clear speech.

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**WALK ON IN.**

Check out our web site virtual pamphlet collection at: www.uwec.edu/counsel