

Situations for Assertiveness Handout

Family relationship patterns

- **Disconnected/Avoidant** – Families hide their stress or mask it with physical symptoms. They are usually uncomfortable asking for or accepting help
- **Confused/Chaotic** – Families are very needy and have repeated crises. They often use multiple providers, which adds confusion and chaos
- **Secure/Balanced** – Families seek help in response to distress and follow a plan of action to deal with the problem at hand

Reiss-Brennan, B., Oppenheim, D., & Kirstein, J.I. (2002). Rebuilding family relationship competencies as a primary health intervention. *Primary Care Companion Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*. 4 (2) p. 41-53.

Ways to improve relationships

- Increase assertiveness – interact with people while standing up for your rights (avoid aggressive or passive behavior)
- Decrease co-dependency – change one-sided, emotionally abusive relationships into healthier, satisfying relationships
- Decrease isolation – Maintain satisfying level of intimacy and social activity
- Reduce stigma – educate, empower, and cope
- Manage chaos – work with your health care team, organize activities and have a consistent schedule

Assertiveness – Interacting with people while standing up for your rights, and avoiding aggressive or passive behavior

- Correct the situation if your rights are being violated
- Seek respect and understanding for your feelings
- Interact in a mature way with others, even if they are acting offensive, defensive, or aggressive
- Confront problems, disagreements, or personal discomforts head on
- Find a “win-win” solution when handling problems in relationships
- Instead of fearing rejection or disapproval, believe “I deserve to stand up for my rights.”

Example of choosing assertiveness

- **Situation:** “There is someone at work that always asks me to do his work for him. I want to tell him “no”, but how can I say it?”
- **Passive** (avoiding eye contact): “I don’t have time right now to do your work. Maybe I can do it later.”
- **Aggressive** (loudly, with intense eye contact): “I am so sick of doing your work for you! Why don’t you do it yourself?”

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- **Assertive** (Kindly, but firmly): “I am overwhelmed with my own work, and I don’t have time to add more. If it would help, I can spend a few minutes answering your questions, but I can’t do your project.”
- An assertiveness Example: **DESC Scripting**. It stands for:
 - **D**escribing the situation
 - **E**xpressing what you are feeling
 - **S**pecifying what you would like to happen
 - **C**onsequences
- **Situation:** A mother asked her son to turn down the radio, but he was busy on the computer and didn’t respond.
 - **Mother:** You are playing the music really loud again.
 - It’s really making it hard for me to concentrate on what I am doing.
 - I need you to turn it down, please.
 - If you don’t, I’ll take the radio out of your room so I can control the volume.
 - **Son:** OK. I’ll turn it down a little.
 - **Mother:** Thank you. Now I can get back to what I was doing.
- An assertiveness Example: **Broken Record Technique**
- **Situation:** A son got poor grades on his report card.
 - **Father:** I need to meet with you and your teacher today.
 - **Son:** I can’t. I have too much homework.
 - **Father:** We need to find out why your grades dropped. I need to meet with you and your teacher today.
 - **Son:** It’s just that the teacher doesn’t like me. It’s not my fault.
 - **Father:** Whatever the reason is, we have to solve it. I need to meet with you and your teacher today
 - **Son:** OK. I can stay at school and do my homework until the meeting. Just let me know what time the meeting will be.
- An assertiveness Example: **Using “I” Statements**
- **Situation:** It is getting harder to pay the bills every month.
 - **Husband:** The electric bill is too high. We need to stop using the clothes dryer because it costs too much. We can hang all the clothes outside to dry.

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- **Wife:** I need my clothes to look and smell nice for work. I don't like the way the clothes get stiff and wrinkled out on the clothesline.
- **Husband:** Every time you run the dryer, it costs money.
- **Wife:** I think it is worth the money if I can keep my work clothes looking like new.
- **Husband:** But something has to be done about the electric bill.
- **Wife:** Even if I use the dryer for my clothes, I will be extra careful to turn the lights and TV off whenever they are not being used. I would be very willing to save some money that way.

- An assertiveness Example: **Fogging**
 - Stay calm when someone is criticizing you.
 - You may agree with parts of the statement that may be fair or useful

- **Situation:** A husband is complaining a lot, but the issue is not exactly what it sounded like at the beginning of the argument
 - **Husband:** I'm tired of taking care of the kids after school while you are at work. You should be here to cook supper and help with their homework.
 - **Wife:** I know I have been working a lot lately. You seem to be taking good care of them. They are good kids, but they do need a lot of attention.
 - **Husband:** You are missing out on your kids' lives when you work so much. They will think you don't care about them.
 - **Wife:** I wish I could work less, too. It might be possible if you got a job that has health insurance.
 - **Husband:** But that won't happen.
 - **Wife:** Then we need to do our best to work together as a team. I will do what I can to spend more time with them when I am not working. I will make or plan something for supper before I go to work. Our children know that I love them, and the reason I am working is to take care of them.

- Assertiveness Example: **Negative Assertion (Agree in Part)**
 - **Husband:** The house is dirty. I need your help!
 - **Wife:** I admit I am not as good of a housekeeper as your mother. I am more comfortable with the "lived in" look.

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- **Husband:** It is too much clutter for me!
- **Wife:** I was too tired to do the supper dishes last night before I fell asleep. I should have put them in the dishwasher at least.
- **Husband:** (laughing) It would help if I could at least find the sink.
- **Accept Compliments**
 - It is OK to agree with nice things that are said about you. If you disagree, don't argue about it
 - It is OK to give credit to others as well as yourself for a job well done
 - Be kind to yourself. When you judge yourself, don't be any harsher than you would be to anyone else in your situation
 - If you don't know what to say, just say, "Thank you"
- **Wife:** I burned the supper. It smells terrible. I'll have to throw it away.
- **Husband:** That's too bad. I was looking forward to eating it. You are usually such a good cook, I'm hardly ever hungry anymore.
- **Wife:** Thank you. I learned a lot about cooking healthy meals from my mother.
- **Husband:** It takes a lot of time to cook a nice supper for us every night.
- **Wife:** I'm glad to do it for you and the kids. But what should we do about this mess?
- **Husband:** Let's open up the windows and go out for pizza.

Decrease co-dependency – Co-dependency usually involves being an “enabler,” and having low self-esteem. Enablers often protect addicted people who then continue their destructive, dependent behavior

- Family members may detach themselves to help them deny, ignore, or avoid difficult emotions
- They focus on the family member who is ill or addicted, not their own health and safety
- **Wife:** We have a meeting at school tonight. You were drinking.
- **Husband:** I had a few drinks before coming home to this mess.
- **Wife:** I am doing my best to keep up with the kids. It would be helpful if you could clean up the things that are bothering you.
- **Husband:** Just go without me. I'll wait here for the babysitter.
- **Wife:** I won't be making excuses for you since you chose not to come. Both us need to be involved. I want you to be sober for the next meeting.