

# Assertiveness Training

**Use This When:**

To teach youth how to express needs or intentions appropriately



**Objectives:**

- to explain the different ways that people relate to one another
- to teach youth how to use socially appropriate strategies to express feelings, stand up for themselves, and disagree with others
- to assist youth in practicing situations in which assertive strategies would be appropriate

**Steps:**

<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Provide overview</b>	<p>Let the youth know that you will be talking about assertiveness skills. Convey that everyone feels frustrated or intimidated by others at times. Point out that it is normal to feel this way, but that it is important to make good choices about how to resolve those situations.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Explain the four styles of relating needs</b>	<p>Explain that when people want something or disagree, they generally behave towards each other in one of four ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aggressively: one person dominates another person without regard for other’s rights, wants, needs, or well-being. Can refer to verbal or physical aggression</li> <li>• Passively: a person gives in to another’s dominance without regard for his or her own rights, wants, needs, or well-being</li> <li>• Passive-aggressively: a person gives in but is then stubborn, resentful, or otherwise negative</li> <li>• Assertively: considered the middle ground between aggression and passivity. A person states his or her needs in a non-aggressive way that respects the other person’s perspective</li> </ul>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Discuss the pros and cons of these four styles</b>	<p>Have the youth consider times in which he or she exhibited these styles of interaction (e.g., “Has there ever been a time when you yelled at or hit someone because you thought that was the only way to express your frustration or to get what you wanted?”).</p> <p>Next, encourage the youth to consider what went well and not so well in each situation. Assist the youth in concluding that assertiveness will help him or her successfully manage stressful situations with others and avoid the escalation of negative feelings (e.g., anxiety, anger) and behavior (e.g., aggression).</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Discuss “personal rights”</b>	<p>Discuss how different situations have different rules and expectations, representing the “rights” of each party. Generate a list of rights of the youth and rights of others in some example situations (e.g., the youth has a right to choose when to do a chore, but not whether to do it), and note that rights of different people may be in real or perceived conflict.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Identify situations in which the youth has difficulty being assertive</b>	<p>Ask the youth to describe situations in which he or she has difficulty being assertive (e.g., “when someone tells me what to do without giving me a choice”). Work to identify the challenging parts of those situations.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Identify internal cues of distress</b>	<p>Ask the youth to identify bodily feelings (e.g., fast heartbeat) and thoughts (e.g., “This person always disrespects me!”) that serve as cues that s/he is feeling distressed about the social interaction. If the youth is unsure, it may be helpful for the youth to monitor and record these cues during difficult situations to increase his/her awareness.</p>

## Steps:

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<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Discuss strategies to delay response</b>	Explain that we often react to provocative situations in the same way, so it is important to use strategies to delay our automatic response. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ignore the other person's behavior for a few moments.</li><li>• Recite self-statements such as "Do not get angry" and "I can handle this situation"</li><li>• Practice deep breathing</li><li>• Mentally rehearse an appropriate response</li></ul>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Discuss general skills</b>	Start the conversation early, rather than waiting until the frustration is intolerable. Be mindful of nonverbal body language. Use a calm, neutral tone of voice and appropriate speaking volume. Avoid personal attacks and judgments. Focus on explaining your own perspective and feelings. When you are caught off guard or things do not appear to be going well, take a break.
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Review specific strategies</b>	Review approaches to being assertive that can help in different situations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Broken Record:</b> State your position but don't offer an explanation. Repeat your position often, but without escalating.</li><li>• <b>Empathy Assertion:</b> Assert needs by (1) making an empathy statement (e.g., "I know you are busy"), (2) stating your position ("I really need your help with this project"), and (3) suggesting a plan of action (e.g., "I would like to schedule a time to work together").</li><li>• <b>Escalating Assertion:</b> Similar to broken record, state your position, but gradually escalate assertion by stating consequences for non-compliance (e.g., "if you don't stop, I will tell the teacher"), and finally, enacting the consequences (e.g., telling the teacher).</li><li>• <b>Fogging:</b> Use humor when possible to diffuse a tense situation.</li></ul>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Model, rehearse, and provide feedback</b>	Modeling, rehearsal, and feedback are integral to assertiveness training. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Create a practice scenario based on situations in which the youth has trouble demonstrating assertiveness.</li><li>• With the youth acting as the confederate, you should assume the role of the youth and demonstrate appropriate assertiveness. Discuss the role play afterwards and highlight the strategies you used.</li><li>• Switch roles so that the youth has a chance to practice. Discuss the role play afterwards, providing specific praise for strengths and noting areas for improvement. Continue rehearsing until satisfactory performance is demonstrated.</li><li>• Vary the scenarios so the youth practices assertiveness towards adults and in the face of peer pressure (i.e., having to say "no").</li><li>• It is often helpful to role play aggressive and passive responses as well as assertive responses to help youth distinguish among the different relational styles and their related outcomes.</li></ul>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Generalize skills</b>	Assist the youth in identifying challenging situations that may arise in the future and how the youth may apply his/her assertiveness skills to successfully manage the situation.

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## Helpful Tips:

- Remember to praise often
- Remember to review often, by **asking questions**
- Brief any caregivers, teachers, or other adult figures who may be involved
- Simplify these steps if you have to
- This can be covered in more than one session/meeting