



EAP News

October 2006 Volume 10 Issue 4

Assertiveness

Jan Worsley, MTS, RMFT, EAP Counsellor

Do you sometimes find yourself being pushed around by others, resentful but unable to stand up for yourself? Do you believe you need to manipulate others to get your wants and needs met? Do you promise to do things that you really don't want to do, and then "forget" to do them? Do you act as though you have the right to push or coerce others in order to get what you want? If so, you (and your relationships) may benefit from developing assertiveness skills.

Assertiveness involves both our attitudes and our behaviours related to expressing our feelings, asking for what we want, and saying "No" to what we don't want.

Passive behaviour discounts one's own rights, needs and wants and yields to someone else's. There may be a fear of saying "No", of "hurting" others' feelings, of being rejected.

People who use **aggressive** behaviour try to get others to do what they want through force or intimidation, with no regard for the other's wishes and needs.

With **passive-aggressive** behaviour instead of stating one's position directly, one uses resistance or even sabotage, to avoid what they don't want.

People behaving in a **manipulative** manner try to get what they want by making others feel guilty or sorry for them.

Any of the above styles can cause problems for oneself or for those one deals with, and can be frustrating and ineffective.

Assertive behaviour recognizes and exercises our basic rights as human beings while acknowledging and respecting the rights of others. It is direct, honest, calm and respectful.

Based on the definitions provided for passive, aggressive, passive-aggressive, manipulative and assertive behaviour, you can assess which style(s) you might typically use for the following situations:

1. A salesperson calls and tries to sell you something you don't want
2. Someone cuts in front of you in line
3. A repairperson has done unsatisfactory work and presented you with the bill
4. The food you ordered in a restaurant is undercooked
5. Your friend asks you to do something that you would prefer not to do
6. Your spouse is not doing their fair share of the work around the house
7. You would like to ask a question in a group, but are concerned someone will think it's silly
8. Your friend drops by unexpectedly just before you were about to leave to run some errands
(See Bourne for additional scenarios)

Assertiveness skills are based on the belief in our basic human rights, some examples are:

I have the right to ask for what I want
 I have the right to get what I pay for
 I have the right to follow my own values and standards
 I have the right to make mistakes (and take responsibility)
 I have the right to set my own priorities
 I have the right to be treated with dignity and respect
 I have the right to change my mind
 I have the right to say "I don't know"
 I have the right to be listened to and taken seriously
 I have the right to say "No" to anything when I feel I am not ready, it is unsafe, or it violates my values
 (See Bourne for others)

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Remember...

It's easy to contact EAP!
 Just call **549-5561**
 or toll free **1-888-409-4499**.
 24/7 After Hours Emergency
1-800-668-9920
 gives you direct access to a
 professional counsellor.





To be clear about what our needs, wants and priorities are, we need to be aware of our feelings:

I feel scared when someone drives too fast, and I can ask them to slow down.

I feel angry when someone is late for a meeting, and I can ask them to be on time in the future.

I feel sad when I perceive that I'm not being heard, and I can ask them to listen and acknowledge what I said even if they don't agree with it.

Notice the use of "I" in the statements above, rather than "you" statements, which can come across as blaming, e.g. "You're so inconsiderate. You never tell me when you'll be late" vs "I'd like you to call when you'll be late". Assertiveness focuses on the other person's behaviour (not their personality), and can include its impact on us. It takes the form of a request, not a demand. It doesn't put the other person down.

Requests can take the form "I would like you to...", and saying "No" can be "No, thank you", "No I'm not able to do that" or "No, I'm not interested". Lengthy explanations or excuses are not required. If the other person tries to manipulate you into doing what they want, simply repeat your "No" statement. If someone says "No" to your request, the assertive response respects their right to do so.

To develop assertiveness skills it can be helpful to select a problem situation, remind yourself of your rights, determine what you want, and practice by writing out what you'd like to say and/or rehearse it out loud to yourself or with a friend.

For more information about how to develop assertiveness, there are some excellent books listed below, and/or you could contact your EAP Counselling Service.

Alberti, Robert E. and Emmons, Michael L. Your Perfect Right: A Guide to Assertive Living, Impact Publishers
Bower, Sharon and Bower, Gordon Asserting Yourself, Addison-Wesley
Bourne, Edmund J. The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook 4th Ed. (Chapter 14, Asserting Yourself), New Harbinger

Collection calls...know the rules

Mary Huntley, Credit Counsellor

You know you owe the money, you want to give them what they're asking for but you can't. The calls won't stop. Falling behind on bills or credit payments is stressful enough and then your debt is transferred to a collection agency. It's not uncommon for them to call you at work, make threats and be verbally abusive. You might accept this because you feel guilty or intimidated, but you have rights.

Collection agencies are governed by a set of rules. Often, just letting them know that you are aware of the rules can curb their inappropriate behaviour. Collection agencies cannot:

- Contact you on a holiday or Sunday before 1 p.m. and after 5 p.m.
- Contact you more than 3 times in a 7 day period without your consent, once they have actually spoken to you
- Use threatening, profane, intimidating or coercive language or use undue, excessive or unreasonable pressure
- Give false or misleading information to any person
- Continue to contact you if you have told them they are not the person they are looking for unless they take reasonable precautions to ensure that you are (i.e. they can't continue to contact you on a son/daughter's debt)
- Contact you if you send a registered letter to the agency saying you dispute the debt and suggest the matter be taken to court
- Contact you if you or your lawyer notify the agency by registered mail to communicate only with your lawyer and provide lawyer's name, address and telephone number

For more information and the procedure for filing a complaint if collection standards are violated, visit the website located at www.ontario.ca/consumerprotection.

If you're having difficulty maintaining your credit payments, a Credit Counsellor can offer professional advice. A Debt Management Program may stop/reduce interest and help you avoid bankruptcy.



Credit Counselling is included in your EAP call us for help - 613-549-5561 or toll free 1-888-409-4499