

# Assertiveness Training



# **Assertiveness Training**

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## Being More Assertive

**What is assertiveness?** The word assertiveness is used to describe a certain pattern of behaviour or a style of communicating with others. It is a way of behaving which means we are communicating our feelings, thoughts and beliefs in an open, honest manner without violating the rights of other people. It is an alternative to being either aggressive, where we abuse other people's rights, or to being passive, where we abuse our own rights. Being assertive means we are able to ask for what we want from others; it means we can say 'no' to the requests of others; it means we can express a range and depth of emotion, for example, love, liking and anger; and it means we can express personal opinions without feeling self-conscious. Very few people manage to be assertive all the time in all areas of their lives. It is undoubtedly true that we could all benefit from being more assertive in some areas of our lives.

**Why are we unassertive?** We act in an unassertive manner because we have learned through our experiences to behave that way. This learning process can be traced back to our early childhood. Small babies have no fear of expressing themselves and communicating their needs. They cry and smile openly; there is no inhibition or 'beating about the bush'. But very quickly children learn to adapt their behaviour to the kind of responses they receive from those around them. Children's behaviour is subtly shaped by the models they are exposed to and by the encouragement, or lack of it, received from parents, family, friends and school.

Some children are encouraged and rewarded for expressing themselves openly and honestly and are quite comfortable expressing a range of emotions. Others may be encouraged to express their thoughts but find it more difficult to express emotions. We have all learned to be the way we are; therefore we can learn to behave differently.

**The effects of being unassertive.** The long-term effect of being unassertive is a growing loss of self-esteem. This term refers to our own evaluation of ourselves in respect to how competent, significant and likeable we see ourselves as people. The more we act in an unassertive way, the weaker is our positive sense of identity: the sense of, 'this is me, this is how I feel and how I think'. This can result in a lack of sense of purpose, or a feeling that we are not in control of our lives, which in turn leads to negative feelings and symptoms of stress. If we are failing to express ourselves openly and we are concealing our feelings and thoughts, this can lead to internal tension, also resulting in physical and mental symptoms of stress. Inherent in unassertive behaviour is poor communication which leads to the development of unhealthy uncomfortable relationships. Communicating effectively in relationships is the best possible insulator against symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression.

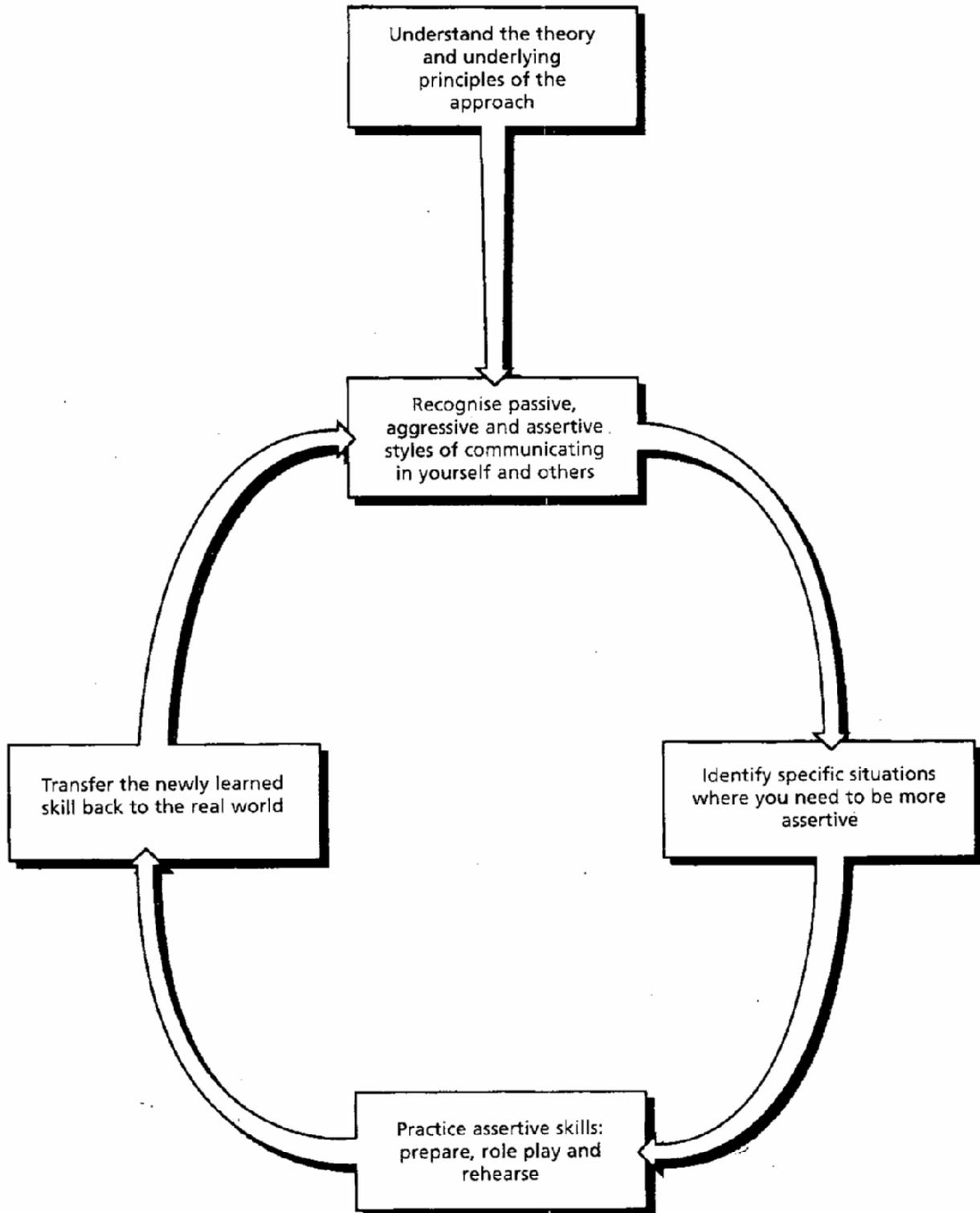
### **Why be more assertive?**

By being more assertive we can improve our sense of identity, our confidence and our self-esteem. A snowball effect is created: the more confident we feel, the more assertive we are and so on. By stating more clearly what our needs are, we increase the chances that these needs will be met.

Being assertive leads to a saving in energy and a reduction in tension. We are no longer preoccupied with avoiding upsetting others, and no longer overly concerned with making gains in an aggressive way. People who are generally assertive are confident people who are simply happy to be themselves.

# Assertiveness Training

## Steps in the Programme



## Assertiveness Questionnaire

Indicate how comfortable you feel in each of the following situations.

Score 1 if you feel very uncomfortable

2 if you feel slightly uncomfortable

3 if you feel reasonably comfortable

4 if you feel very comfortable.

**ENTER**  
**1, 2, 3 or 4**

1 Asking for the service you expect when you haven't received it in a shop or restaurant	
2 Expressing anger when you are angry	
3 Receiving a compliment and saying something to acknowledge that you agree	
4 Discussing another person's criticism of you openly with them	
5 Speaking up in front of a group	
6 Telling a friend that they are doing something that bothers you	
7 Requesting the return of a borrowed item without apology	
8 Initiating a conversation with a stranger	
9 Telling an acquaintance that you like him or her	
10 Returning a defective item to a shop or restaurant	
11 Asking a favour of someone	
12 Turning down a request for a meeting or date	
13 Admitting to either fear or ignorance	
14 Asking for and accepting constructive criticism	
15 Saying 'no' to someone without being apologetic	
16 Telling a friend exactly how you feel	
17 Arguing with another person	
18 Touching a colleague or friend affectionately	
19 Treating yourself or doing something just for you	
20 Refusing a friend a favour when you don't want to do it	

**Scoring**

**Total Score**

**Over 55** You are assertive

**40-55** You could be more assertive

**Under 40** You are unassertive

## **Taking Yourself into being Assertive**

At times we can all become prone to negative, irrational thinking which causes a block to assertive behaviour. We need to identify these negative thoughts, or obstacles, and then to challenge them. Are they based on irrational beliefs? Examine the following list, and note which of the thoughts and styles of faulty thinking you are most prone to:

- 1. It is uncaring, rude, and selfish to say what you want.  
-----
2. If I assert myself I will upset the other person and ruin our relationship.  
-----
3. It will be terribly embarrassing if I say what I think.  
-----
4. If someone says 'no' to my request it is because they don't like or love me.  
-----
5. I shouldn't have to say what I need or how I feel; people close to me should already know.  
-----
6. I have no right to change my mind; neither has anybody else.  
-----
7. I don't really mind the present situation.  
-----
8. It will all work out in the end, and anyway, it's not my fault.  
-----
9. People should keep their feelings to themselves.  
-----
10. I shouldn't say how I'm really feeling or thinking because I don't want to burden others with my problems.  
-----

Add any other negative thoughts you can think of.

## Our Rights

*The underlying philosophy of assertiveness training is based on the premise that we are all equal and that we all possess the same basic rights. Many people seem to have forgotten, or have never been told, that these rights exist. The goal of assertiveness is to stand up for your rights without violating the rights of others. A good starting point is to remind yourself of some of these basic rights.*

-----  
1. I have the right to express my feelings.  
-----

2. I have the right to express my opinions and beliefs.  
-----

3. I have the right to say 'yes' and 'no' for myself  
-----

4. I have the right to change my mind.  
-----

5. I have the right to say, 'I don't understand'.  
-----

6. I have the right simply to be myself without having to act for other people's benefit  
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7. I have the right to decline responsibility for other people's problems.  
-----

8. I have the right to make reasonable requests of others.  
-----

9. I have the right to set my own priorities.  
-----

10. I have the right to be listened to, and taken seriously  
-----

11. I have the right to make mistakes and feel comfortable about admitting to them.  
-----

12. I have the right to be illogical in making decisions.  
-----

13. I have the right to say, 'I don't care'.  
-----

14. I have the right to be miserable or cheerful.  
-----

Add any other rights that you can think of.

## Passive Behaviour

### **Definition**

This involves violating your own rights by failing to express honest feelings, thoughts and beliefs, and consequently permitting others to violate your rights. Passive or non-assertive behaviour can also mean expressing your thoughts and feelings in such an apologetic and self-effacing manner that others can easily disregard them. The passive responder allows others to walk all over them, like a doormat. Non-assertive people feel they have no control over events: they are controlled and immobilised. Passive people do not allow their needs to take precedence over, or be as valid as others. They allow others to make their decisions for them, even though they may resent it later. They feel helpless, powerless and inhibited. Non-assertion sometimes shows a subtle lack of respect for the other person's ability to take disappointments, to shoulder some responsibility, and to handle their own problems. The person who behaves passively is occasionally prone to such a build up of stress and anger that they eventually explode in a really aggressive manner.

### **Message communicated**

I don't count, so you can take advantage of me. My feelings, needs and thoughts are less important than yours. I'll put up with just about anything from you.

### **Subconscious thoughts**

Take care of me and understand my needs telepathically. Will you still love/respect me if I am assertive? I've got to protect you from hurt.

### **Goal**

To appease others unpleasantness at and to avoid conflict and any cost.

### **Verbal and non-verbal characteristics**

- Rambling; letting things slide without comment
- Beating about the bush — not saying what you mean
- Apologising inappropriately in a soft, unsteady voice
- Being unclear; averting gaze
- Posture — backing off from others, slouching shoulders
- Wringing hands; winking or laughing when expressing anger
- Covering mouth with hand
- Using phrases such as, '... if it wouldn't be too much trouble', ... but do whatever you want', 'I ... er ... um ... would like um ... you ... er ... to do ..

### **Payoffs**

You are praised for being selfless, a good sport. If things go wrong, as a passive follower, you are rarely blamed. Others will protect and look after you. You avoid, postpone, or hide the conflict that you fear

### **Price**

Others often make unreasonable demands on you. When, by your lack of assertion, you have allowed a relationship to develop in a way you don't like, then shifting the pattern becomes more difficult. You restrict yourself into other people's images of a lovable, good person. When you repress or bottle up so much anger and frustration, you simultaneously diminish other more positive feelings in yourself, including love and affection.

## Aggressive Behaviour

### **Definition**

This involves standing up for your personal rights and expressing your thoughts, feelings and beliefs in a way which is usually inappropriate and always violates the rights of the other person. People often feel devastated by an encounter with an aggressive person. Superiority is maintained by puffing others down. When threatened, you attack, aiming at the vulnerability exposed in the other.

### **Message communicated**

This is what I think, what I want, what I feel. What matters to you isn't important to me.

### **Subconscious thoughts**

I'll get you, before you have a chance of getting me. I'm out for Number One. The world is a baffle ground and I am out to win.

### **Goal**

To dominate, to win, to force the other person to lose, and to punish.

5 Verbal and non-verbal characteristics

- Intruding into the other's space
- Staring the other person out
- Strident, sarcastic or condescending voice
- Parental body gestures (eg, finger pointing)
- Threats (eg, 'You'd better watch out . . .', 'If you don't . .
- Put downs (eg, 'You've got to be kidding', 'Don't be so stupid')
- Evaluative comments (ie, emphasising concepts like 'should', 'bad', 'ought')

4 Sexist/racist remarks

### **Payoffs**

You get others to do your bidding. Things tend to go your way and you like that feeling of control in shaping your life. You are likely to secure the material needs and objects you desire. You are less vulnerable in a culture characterised by struggle, hostility and competition.

### **Price**

Aggressive behaviour creates enemies, which can induce greater fear and a sense of paranoia, making life more difficult for you. It through your aggression, you control what others do, this takes time and mental energy and makes it difficult for you to relax. Relationships tend to be based on negative emotions and are likely to be unstable.

Aggressive people often do feel inferior deep down and try to compensate for that by puffing others down.

## Assertive Behaviour

### **Definition**

This involves standing up for your personal rights and expressing your thoughts, feelings and beliefs directly, honestly and openly in ways that are respectful of the rights of others. An assertive person acts without undue anxiety or guilt. Assertive people respect themselves and other people and take responsibility for their actions and choices. They recognise their needs and ask openly and directly for what they want. If refused, they may feel saddened, disappointed or inconvenienced, but their self-concept isn't shattered. They are not over-reliant on the approval of others, and feel secure and confident within themselves. Assertive people give the lead to other people as to how they wish to be treated.

### **Message communicated**

This is what I think. This is how I feel. This is how I see the situation. How about you? If our needs conflict, I am certainly ready to explore our differences and I may be prepared to compromise.

### **Subconscious thoughts**

I won't allow you to take advantage of me and I won't attack you for being who you are.

### **Goal**

To communicate clearly, adult to adult.

### **Verbal and non-verbal characteristics**

+ Receptive listening

- Firm, relaxed voice
- Direct eye contact
- Erect, balanced, open body stance
- Voice appropriately loud for the situation
- \* 'I' statements ('I like', 'I want', 'I don't like')
- Cooperative phrases ('What are your thoughts on this?')
- Emphatic statements of interest (I would like to. .)

### **Payoffs**

The more you stand up for yourself and act in a manner you respect, the higher your self-esteem. Your chances of getting what you want out of life improve greatly when you let others know what you want and stand up for your own rights and needs. Expressing yourself directly at the time of negative feelings means that resentment is not allowed to build up. Being less preoccupied with self-consciousness and anxiety, and less driven by the needs of self-protection and control, you can see, hear and love others more easily.

### **Price**

Friends may have benefited from your non-assertion and may sabotage your newly developed assertion. You are reshaping your beliefs and re-examining values that have been closely held since childhood. This can be frightening. There are no 'tablets of stone' to guarantee an elegant outcome of your efforts. There is often pain involved in being assertive.

## Identifying Response Styles

Rate each response in terms of being either passive, assertive or aggressive by ticking the appropriate column.

Passive  
Assertive  
Aggressive

<b>1</b> In a no-smoking compartment of a crowded train a fellow passenger lights a cigarette. Julie hates the smell of cigarettes.			
<b>RESPONSE A</b> Julie gets up and leaves the compartment.			
<b>RESPONSE B</b> Julie starts coughing and spluttering then says to the man, 'Listen, that is a disgusting, antisocial habit. I don't care if you kill yourself, but I don't want to die. Put that cigarette out or go to another compartment.'			
<b>RESPONSE C</b> Julie points to the 'No Smoking' sign and says, 'This is a non-smoking compartment. Would you mind moving to a smoking area as I really don't like the smoke.'			

<b>2</b> In a packed cinema the people behind Mr Brown keep talking in a fairly loud voice, detracting from his enjoyment of the film. The cinema is so crowded that he can't change seats.			
<b>RESPONSE A</b> Mr Brown suffers in silence and says nothing.			
<b>RESPONSE B</b> Mr Brown turns around and snarls at them, 'Don't you have any respect for others? If you don't shut up immediately I'll call the manager and have you thrown out.'			
<b>RESPONSE C</b> Mr Brown turns around, looks directly at the talkers and says, 'Your talking is distracting me from the film.'			

<b>3</b> Mary, a secretary, is given a large piece of typing to complete at five minutes to five. She is planning to go out that evening and wants to leave at five o'clock.			
<b>RESPONSE A</b> Mary is really angry and thinks, 'What a thoughtless boss I have. I told him I was going out tonight.' She suffers in silence and leaves work at 6.15 feeling angry and irritable.			
<b>RESPONSE B</b> Mary explains to her boss that she'd like to leave on time and that she would do the work first thing next morning unless it was really very urgent.			
<b>RESPONSE C</b> Mary feels angry but starts the work. At about 5.30 she explodes, kicks the waste paper bin and storms into her boss's office saying that she's sick of the job and his thoughtlessness. She goes home and feels guilty for her anger.			

## Identifying Situations to work on

### *Everyday situations that may require assertiveness*

#### **AT WORK**

How do you respond when:

- 1 You receive a compliment on your appearance, or someone praises your work?
- 2 You are criticised unfairly?
- 3 You are criticised legitimately by a superior?
- 4 You have to confront a subordinate for continual lateness or sloppy work?
- 5 Your boss makes a sexual innuendo, or makes a pass at you?

#### **AT HOME**

How do you respond when:

- 1 One of your parents criticises you?
- 2 You are irritated by a persistent habit in someone you love?
- 3 Everybody leaves the washing-up to you?
- 4 You want to say No' to a proposed visit to a relative?
- 5 Your partner feels amorous but you are not in the mood?

#### **IN PUBLIC**

How do you respond when:

- 1 In a restaurant the food you ordered arrives cold or overcooked?
- 2 A fellow passenger in a non-smoking compartment lights a cigarette?
- 3 You are faced with an unhelpful shop assistant?
- 4 Somebody barges in front of you in a queue?
- 5 You take an inferior article back to a shop?

#### **AMONGST FRIENDS**

How do you respond when:

- 1 You feel angry with the way a friend has treated you?
- 2 A friend makes what you consider to be an unreasonable request?
- 3 You want to ask a friend for a favour?
- 4 You ask a friend for repayment of a loan of money?
- 5 You have to negotiate with a friend on which film to see or where to meet?

## Working out your own Assertiveness Hierarchy

Write down 10 situations from any area of your life in which you would like to be more assertive (home, work, public, friends).

When you have the list in front of you, write down next to each situation how you behave now (passive, aggressive, both). You may find you need to write down more than one category if you respond differently at different times.

Look at the list and see if you can arrange it in order of difficulty. Find the situation which you can almost handle assertively but not quite and number it 1 — the most difficult situation will be numbered 10.

### Example List

### Your List

1. Ask the lodger to put top on toothpaste (passive)	1.
2. Ask children to tidy up their bedrooms (aggressive)	2.
3. Ask my sister to return the cassette recorder that she borrowed (passive)	3.
4. Tell neighbours to keep the noise down at night (passive aggressive)	4.
5. Tell wife when I feel I want to be left alone (aggressive)	5.
6. Tell Mum how much I like her and give her a cuddle (Passive)	6.
7. Tell my mother in law that I do not want her to smoke cigarettes in my house (passive)	7.
8. Apologise to a colleague for snapping at her the other day (passive)	8.
9. Delegate teaching commitments to a colleague for the next 6 months (passive)	9.
10. Ring the bank manager and tell him I need more time to make up my mind (passive)	10.

Order of difficulty    1 = Easiest    10 = Most difficult

## Practice Exercise for Assertion

*The following is a list of behaviour assignments or homework exercises which will prove useful in increasing your level of assertiveness. Choose an assignment which would be moderately difficult and set a deadline to do it. If you haven't done it by that time, either assume it was too difficult and choose another task, or alternatively, introduce a reward or incentive for doing it by another specified time.*

1. Say 'good morning' to somebody to whom you do not usually speak.  
.....
2. Stop two people in the street and ask for directions,  
.....
3. Go into an expensive shop, try on a number of articles of clothing, but buy nothing.  
.....
4. Go into a shop and ask if they will give you change for a five pound note.  
.....
5. Pay a compliment to a waitress, shop assistant or fellow-worker.  
.....
6. Without expecting a response, make a comment to the person next to you in a queue, or on a bus.  
.....
7. Buy something from a shop and then deliberately return it, saying, 'I've changed my mind'.  
.....
8. Deliberately touch someone you like on the arm or shoulder.  
.....
9. Tell your spouse or close friend something personal about yourself that you have never told anybody before.  
.....
10. Make a point of telling a joke or a funny story to a friend.  
.....
11. Ask somebody you know, 'How are you today?' and deliberately take an interest try to draw them out and find out how they are feeling.  
.....
12. Make a point of telling somebody how you are feeling, and/or what you have been doing recently.  
.....
13. Tell somebody that you like something about their appearance, for example, 'I like that tie'.  
.....
14. Tell somebody close to you something that has been irritating you about them which you haven't ever mentioned before.  
.....
15. Ask someone for a favour in a direct way.  
.....



## Listening Skills

Being a good listener is an important skill in any relationship, whether at work or at home. Therapists, counsellors and interviewers learn and practice these skills of attending, following and reflecting. Examine these skills and practice the ones that you are poorest at.

### **Attending skills**

*A posture of involvement* Incline your body towards speaker — facing squarely — open posture — appropriate distance.

*Appropriate body motion*

Moving in a synchronised way with the speaker, not to distract, not rigid and unmoving.

*Eye contact*

With face and other parts of body — not staring, not avoiding.

*Non-distracting environment*

No distractors — remove sizeable physical barriers.

### **Following skills**

*Door openers*

Non-coercive invitations to talk — a description of the other person's body language — 'Care to talk about it?' Silence — attending.

*Minimal encouragers*

'Mm-hmmm . . . really . . . right . . . oh!', head nodding.

*In frequent questions*

Open questions, eg, 'How did that make you feel?', rather than, 'Do you like him?'; ask only one question at a time.

*Attentive silence*

Offers personal space to think, feel and express.

### **Reflecting skills**

*Paraphrasing*

A concise response stating the essence of the other's content in the listener's own words.

*Reflecting feelings*

Mirroring back to the speaker, in succinct statements, the emotions they are communicating — focus on feeling words — observe body language. Ask yourself how you would feel in that situation. 'You look pretty upset.' 'Sounds like you're really angry.'

*Reflecting meaning*

Linking the speaker's feelings to facts to provide meaning. 'You feel angry because of "a", "b" and "c"'

*Summarising*

Brief restatement of the main themes and feelings the speaker expressed over a long conversation.

## Common Communication Spoilers

Some people tend to spoil good communication in a number of ways: by judging the other person; by always sending a solution; or by avoiding the other's emotional concerns. These behaviours get in the way of good quality expressive communication and relationships.

### **Judging**

#### *Criticising*

Making a negative evaluation of the other person, 'You brought it on yourself

#### *Name calling*

Putting down or stereotyping the other person, 'You are just another insensitive male'.

#### *Diagnosing*

Playing emotional detective — analysing, 'Just because you went to college'.

#### *Praising evaluatively*

Over-praising, or manipulating by praise, can produce a defensive response, 'You're such a good girl, will you

### **Sending solutions**

#### *Ordering*

A solution sent coercively can produce resistance, resentment and sabotage, especially *when backed by force*, 'will you talk to me'.

#### *Threatening*

A solution sent with an emphasis on punishment, 'Do it or else I'm leaving', produces the same results as ordering.

#### *Moralising*

Telling another person what they should or ought to do — it is demoralising and fosters anxiety and resentment.

#### *Excessive/inappropriate questioning*

Closed-ended questions can be real conversation stoppers, answered in a few words, 'Are you tired now?' (closed). 'How are you feeling now?' (open).

#### *Advising*

Giving a solution to their problems implies a lack of confidence in the other person's ability to understand and to cope. 'If I was you I would . . .', sometimes the person may not want advice but may want to be listened to.

#### Avoiding the other's concerns

#### *Diverting*

Pushing the other's problem aside through distraction. 'Don't dwell on it, let's talk about something else.' A form of emotional withdrawal.

#### Logical argument

When another person is under stress or very emotional, an appeal to logic without consideration of the emotions can be infuriating, and a way of avoiding emotional involvement.

#### *Reassuring*

Trying to stop the other person from feeling the negative emotions he or she is experiencing, 'Don't worry, everything will work out in the end.' It can be a form of emotional withdrawal.

## Non Verbal Behaviour

	<b>PASSIVE</b>	<b>ASSERTIVE</b>	<b>AGGRESSIVE</b>
<b>Body movements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Hand wringing</li> <li>◆ Hunching shoulders</li> <li>◆ Covering mouth with hands</li> <li>◆ Crossing arms for protection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Open hand movements</li> <li>◆ Sitting/standing upright and relaxed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Finger pointing</li> <li>◆ Fist clenching</li> <li>◆ Striding around (impatiently)</li> <li>◆ Leaning forward or over</li> <li>◆ Crossing arms (unapproachable)</li> </ul>
<b>Eye contact</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Evasive</li> <li>◆ Looking down</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Firm direct eye contact without staring</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Trying to stare down and intimidate</li> </ul>
<b>Facial expression</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ 'Ghost' smiles when expressing anger or being criticised</li> <li>◆ Raising eyebrows in anticipation</li> <li>◆ Jaw trembling, lip biting</li> <li>◆ Quick-changing features</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Smiling when pleased</li> <li>◆ Frowning when angry</li> <li>◆ Features steady</li> <li>◆ Jaw relaxed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Smiling may become sneering</li> <li>◆ Scowling when angry</li> <li>◆ Jaws set firm</li> </ul>
<b>Speech pattern</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Hesitant and filled with pauses</li> <li>◆ Sometimes jerking from fast to slow</li> <li>◆ Frequent throat clearing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Fluent, few hesitations</li> <li>◆ Emphasising key words</li> <li>◆ Steady even pace</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Fluent, few hesitations</li> <li>◆ Often abrupt, clipped</li> <li>◆ Emphasising blaming words</li> <li>◆ Often fast</li> </ul>
<b>Voice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Often dull and monotonous</li> <li>◆ Tone may be singsong or whining</li> <li>◆ Over-soft or over-warm</li> <li>◆ Quiet, often dropping away</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Steady and firm</li> <li>◆ Tone is middle range, rich and warm</li> <li>◆ Sincere and clear</li> <li>◆ Not over-loud or quiet</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Very firm</li> <li>◆ Tone is sarcastic, sometimes cold and harsh</li> <li>◆ Hard and sharp</li> <li>◆ Strident, often shouting, rising at end</li> </ul>

## Verbal Behaviour

TYPE OF LANGUAGE	PASSIVE	ASSERTIVE	AGGRESSIVE
	<p><b>Long rambling statements</b></p> <p><b>Fill in words</b> 'Maybe', 'Er', 'Sort of'</p> <p><b>Frequent justifications</b> 'I wouldn't normally say anything, only ...'</p> <p><b>Apologies</b> 'I'm terribly sorry to bother you ...', 'please excuse me, but ...'</p> <p><b>Unacknowledged choice</b> 'I should', 'I ought', 'I have to'</p> <p><b>Qualifiers</b> 'It's only my opinion', 'I might be wrong'</p> <p><b>Self-dismissal</b> 'It's not important', 'It really doesn't matter'</p> <p><b>Self-putdowns</b> 'I'm useless ... hopeless', 'You know me'</p>	<p>'I' statements that are brief, clear and to the point 'I like', 'I feel', 'I think', 'I prefer'</p> <p><b>Distinction between fact and opinion</b> 'My experience is different.'</p> <p><b>Suggestions without 'shoulds', 'oughts'.</b> 'How about', 'Would you like me to ...?'</p> <p><b>Constructive criticism without blame</b> 'I feel irritated when you interrupt me'</p> <p><b>Seeking other's opinions</b> 'How does this fit in with your ideas?'</p> <p><b>Willingness to explore other solutions</b> 'How can we get around this problem?'</p>	<p><b>Excessive emphasis on 'I'</b> 'My view is ...', 'I think'</p> <p><b>Boastfulness</b> 'I haven't got problems like you'</p> <p><b>Opinion expressed as fact</b> 'That's a useless way to do it', 'Nobody wants to behave like that'</p> <p><b>Threatening questions</b> 'Haven't you finished it yet?' 'Why on earth did you do it like that?'</p> <p><b>Threatening requests</b> 'You'd better do that', 'I want that done or else'</p> <p><b>Heavy handed advice</b> 'You should', 'You ought', 'Why don't you?'</p> <p><b>Blame</b> 'You made a mess of that'</p> <p><b>Sarcasm</b> 'You must be joking', 'I don't suppose you managed to do that?'</p>

## Six Assertiveness Skills

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### **1. Being specific**

Decide what it is you want or feel, and say so specifically or directly. This skill will help you to be clear about what exactly it is you want to communicate. Avoid unnecessary padding and keep your statement simple and brief.

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### **2. Repetition (broken record technique)**

This skill involves preparing what you are going to say and repeating it exactly, as often as necessary, in a calm relaxed manner. It helps you to stick to your statement or request without being distracted. Using this technique, you can relax because you know what you are going to say and you can maintain a steady comment, avoiding irrelevant logic or argumentative bait.

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### **3. Workable compromise**

This is important to remember when there is a conflict between your needs or wishes, and those of someone else. Assertiveness is not about winning, so you need to negotiate from an equal position. This means finding a true compromise which takes both parties' needs into consideration. Compromising on a solution -to a difficult situation need not compromise your self-respect.

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### **4. Self-disclosure**

This skill allows you to disclose your feelings with a simple statement, for example, 'I feel nervous' or 'I feel guilty'. The immediate effect is to reduce your anxiety enabling you to relax and take charge of yourself and your feelings.

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### **5. Negative assertion**

This skill involves calmly agreeing with someone else's true criticism of your negative qualities and accepting that you have faults eg, 'Your desk is a complete and utter tip. You are very disorganised.' 'Yes, it's true, I'm not very tidy'. The key to using negative assertion is, of course, self-confidence and a belief that you have the ability to change yourself if you so wish. By agreeing with and accepting criticism, if it is appropriate, you need not feel totally demolished.

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### **6. Negative inquiry**

This skill involves actively prompting criticism of your behaviour, to ascertain whether the criticism is constructive, or to expose it as manipulative and hurtful: -For example, 'You'll find that difficult won't you, because you are so shy?' You reply 'In what ways do you think I'm shy?' If the criticism is constructive, that information can be used constructively and the general channel of communication will be improved.

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## **Saying No**

Some people find it exceedingly difficult to say no. This often means that they spend a great deal of their time doing things for other people that they really do not want to do. This can often lead to a gradual build-up of resentment and frustration which can poison relationships. It also means that people often feel that they have little control over their time and their life in general. It is rather like feeling flooded and not being able to turn the tap off. Saying 'no' to the demands of others is the equivalent of turning off the tap of external demands or stresses. It puts you in the driver's seat and means that you have more control over your life and time.

### **Beliefs about Saying 'No'**

1. There appear to be a number of key beliefs which would predispose people to have difficulty saying 'no'. These beliefs need to be challenged and modified.
  - a Saying 'no' is rude and aggressive.
  - b Saying 'no' is unkind, uncaring and selfish.
  - c Saying 'no' will hurt and upset others and make them feel rejected.
  - d If I say 'no' to somebody they will cease to like me.
  - e Other's needs are more important than mine.
  - f Saying 'no' over little things is small minded and petty.
2. The key to refusing requests and saying 'no' is to be able to accept the following belief.
  - a 'Other people have the right to ask, and I have the right to refuse'.
  - b 'When you say "no" you are refusing a request, not rejecting a person'. We may have come to associate saying 'no' with rejection, but refusal does not have to mean rejection. Refusing the behaviour or request and rejecting the person are two quite different things.
  - c When we say 'yes' to one thing we are actually saying no to something else. We always have a choice and we are continuously making choices.
3. People who have difficulty saying 'no' usually over estimate the difficulty that the other person will have in accepting the refusal. By expressing our feelings openly and honestly, it actually liberates the other person to express their feelings. By saying 'no' to somebody it allows them to say 'no' to your requests while still also being able to ask for further requests.

### **Hints for saying 'no'**

- a As a rule keep it brief — avoid long rambling justifications.
- b Be polite — saying something like, 'thank you for asking
- c Speak slowly with warmth otherwise 'no' may sound abrupt.
- d Be honest about your feelings. It may help to say 'I find this difficult'.

### **Ways of saying 'no'**

- a Direct 'no'. The aim is to say no without apologising. The other person has the problem but you do not have to allow him or her to pass it on to you. A direct no can be quite forceful and can be effective with salespeople.
- b Reflecting 'no' This technique involves reflecting back the content and feeling of the request, but adding your assertive refusal at the end. For example; 'I know you're looking forward to a walk this afternoon, but I can't come'.
- c Reasoned 'no'. This gives, very briefly, the genuine reason for the refusal. For example; 'I can't come for a walk this afternoon because I've got to work on my book'.
- d Rain check 'no'. This says 'no' to the present request but leaves room for negotiation. For example; 'I can't come for a walk this afternoon, but I'd like to go this evening'.

## **Expressing Anger**

Anger is a normal, healthy human emotion which, if not expressed, can lead to long-term consequences, such as anxiety, depression, irritability and a variety of physical complaints. Anger can sometimes be a creative source of energy that helps us to move forward, and motivates us to change our lives. Some people, particularly women, are from an early age, discouraged from expressing anger and pay a price for being 'too nice'. We may have internalised a number of unhelpful beliefs that need reassessing.

### **'Getting angry is not the correct way to behave.'**

This is an unreal expectation; many children are brought up to believe it is wrong to express anger. So they live with a feeling of failure every time they get angry. In fact, showing appropriate anger can be positive. Genuine grievances can be brought to the notice of others, and problems can then be resolved by discussion.

### **'Getting angry is destructive and negative.'**

People often assume that anger is destructive to a person or to a relationship. In fact, anger can make the other person sit up and take notice. When anger is expressed at the time of the grievance, it then feels less destructive and explosive.

### **'If I express my anger, it will completely wreck him.'**

People are often unwilling to express anger directly, fearing that the other person is too frail to cope with it. In fact, this is very unlikely; they may have communicated frailty in order to manipulate you. Once you have expressed your bottled-up anger, the realities of the relationship will be in the open, therefore more manageable and less explosive.

### **'If I allow myself to get angry, I might lose control and cause injury.'**

Many people believe that the consequences of expressing anger directly will be catastrophic, for example they might explode or injure or even kill the other person. In fact, letting out angry feelings, when appropriate, helps us to become familiar with the feelings, less frightened of them and better able to control them.

### **'If I get angry, they will get me back in return.'**

This belief usually originates in childhood if expressions of anger were strongly punished by parents or other adults. Many of the consequences of expressing anger, feared from childhood, will in reality not happen in adulthood.

### **'If I get angry, I will be rejected.'**

In some more formal relationships, getting angry may lead to a negative response, but in a close relationship, being able to express anger means you are accepted by the other person as you are, not as an ideal.

## **Dealing with Criticism**

The assertive person can accept and learn from criticism. It may at times be painful but it is necessary for any self improvement. People who are predominantly passive very often do not hear, or benefit from, constructive criticism. Rather, their reaction is to readily agree with the criticism — ‘Yes you’re right, I’m hopeless’ — and then emotionally drown in a sea of self-reproach. People who are locked into an aggressive communication style are also often impervious to criticism as they tend to see it as a personal attack. Their reaction is how dare you’, and their response is to fight and defend themselves to prove that they are winners. They do not actually listen or learn from the criticism at all.

How we react to criticism is largely based on our early experience as children. If as a child we experienced criticism as a hurtful rejection we may find it hard to take as adults. If as a child criticism was carried out lovingly it will be easier to accept. Perhaps as a child the person did not experience any criticism at all and therefore as an adult finds it devastating. It is very important to differentiate between a person’s behaviour being criticised, and the person as a whole being criticised. So for example, if we are told, ‘You are stupid’ — that is negative labelling of the whole person and tends to be experienced as rejecting. However, if we are told ‘that was a stupid thing to do’ — that is a comment on our behaviour, and implies that we have the power to change that behaviour. There is a big difference.

### **Coping with Constructive Criticism**

#### **1 Accept the criticism**

The simplest response to realistic criticism is to accept it without expressing any guilt or other negative emotions. We all have faults, make mistakes. If we can accept this reality we can learn from it. So the response to, ‘you are always so untidy’, might be, ‘Yes, I am sometimes untidy, and I’m trying to be tidier’. Do not be afraid to say, ‘sorry, I made a mistake’.

#### **2 Ask for information**

This also involves accepting the criticism, if we feel that it is soundly based, but also actually asking for clarification from the person who is criticising us to try and pin down the precise nature of the criticism. So, the response to, ‘You made a mess of that’, might be, ‘Yes, what was it that was particularly bad?’

### **Coping with destructive criticism**

**1 Disagree with the criticism:** This involves a straight forward, calm assertive disagreement, ‘No, I’m not always late’.

**2 Ask for information:** This involves asking for more information from your critic to expose whether the criticism is constructive or destructive. If the criticism is constructive the information from the critic will be useful and your relationship will be enriched. If it is destructive the criticiser might be put on the spot. For example, ‘In what way do you think that I am hopeless?’

**3 Fogging:** This skill helps us deal with destructive criticism and put downs designed to make us feel bad. It involves agreeing with anything which is obviously true in the criticism but neither agreeing nor disagreeing with other aspects of the criticism. If, for example, somebody describes you as being dreadfully lazy and untidy, your response might be ‘Yes you’re probably right, I am sometimes untidy’. By using fogging you merely aim to stop the manipulative criticism, by refusing to reward the put-down. Your attacker wants you to feel bad, and if he or she does not get the sought response eg, a fight, but gets smothered in the ‘fog’, it is not rewarding and they are less likely try again.

## **Giving Constructive Criticism**

- 1 Choose the right time and place.
- 2 Stay calm and speak slowly.
- 3 Focus on a specific behaviour, avoid sweeping generalisations and other items from the past and avoid undermining the person.
- 4 Acknowledge the positive first. Sandwich a negative comment in between two positive comments.
- 5 Do not use labels, stereotypes or insults.

*The art of negotiation, or resolving grievances, like many assertiveness skills, is becoming a profession in its own right. We certainly do not need sophisticated training to negotiate solutions to everyday problems, but the following points are worth bearing in mind.*

### **1 Choose the right time and place**

Setting time aside to have a joint discussion is preferable to presenting a problem when the other person is busy or preoccupied with other problems.

### **2 Present the problem in a constructive way**

Work out beforehand the points you want to make and how to put them. Write them down. Be specific, don't beat about the bush as this only causes confusion about the issue you are trying to raise. Be tactful; being sarcastic or unpleasant only results in the other person becoming defensive and resistant to change. Keep calm, if possible using relaxation techniques to help you prepare. At the very least take a couple of long, slow, deep breaths before you start.

### **3 Listen to what the other person has got to say**

Concentrate on what is being said and let the other person know you understand what he or she is saying. Summarise the other person's position and feed it back: 'So your view is that . . .' If the other person is showing feelings, acknowledge that you are aware of them, for example, 'I can see that this is difficult for you'. Ask for clarification. Make sure that you fully understand the other person's position, reasoning and needs.

### **4 Discuss differences**

Restate your original case, then present a summary of the other person's position. Discuss the specific areas of difference. Beware of becoming side-tracked; don't fall for red herrings. Sometimes the broken record technique is useful to bring the discussion back to the central subject (see handout 'Six Assertiveness Skills').

### **5 Be prepared to offer a compromise**

Remember the issue is not about winning or losing, but about reaching a compromise that is acceptable to both parties. Don't be stubborn and wait for the other person to give in first. Make a concession and look for one in return. Emphasise that you both share a common goal and that you are willing to explore how that can be achieved.

## **Dealing with personal grievances**

- a Acknowledge your own feelings to yourself eg anger, hurt. 'I feel . . .
- b Write down what it is that you do not like: Separate fact from feeling. 'I don't like you doing....'
- c Identify what you would like 'I would like it if.....
- d Arrange a meeting.
- e State your grievance. Feelings first, followed by what you would like. Do not get distracted or use critical words. State what you would like: .
- f Listen to the other person & discuss differences, reach agreement if possible.

## Overcoming Sulking

Sulking, being unwilling to talk, or withdrawing from engaging in constructive communication, is an unhelpful way of communicating either anger or disappointment. We only sulk with those we are emotionally close to. We are likely to sulk when someone close to us does not do what we want them to do, or does something we do not like, such as criticising, rejecting or disapproving, or depriving us of something. The function of sulking is to punish the other person; to get what we want; to extract proof of caring; to restore power; or to protect oneself from hurt.

This pattern of unhealthy communication has its roots in childhood experiences, where parents were likely to have avoided openly expressing negative feelings, and did not give the child permission to openly express direct anger. The sulking child punishes the parent by freezing them out, inviting them to cajole him or her out of it, but simultaneously being determined not to be appeased.

Be patient with the person who sulks. Do not say 'stop sulking', when they are sulking as this only makes matters worse — they are likely to retreat even further into their shell. Ask the person, when they are not sulking, how you can help.

### **Unhelpful beliefs underlying sulking**

1. *Demandingness* or over-use of the words 'should', 'must' and 'ought'. This 'should' not happen. The other person 'should' behave differently. 'must' be treated well. People 'should' not get angry, or criticise me.
2. *Catastrophising/awfulising*. 'The world is a terrible, awful place for allowing such a thing to happen', 'Isn't it awful', 'I can't bear it'.
3. *All or nothing thinking*. 'That person is bad they have rejected me . . . they do not accept me. I cannot accept the other person for being like they are ... I cannot tolerate this feeling'.

### **Helpful beliefs**

There are healthier, more constructive, alternatives to 'sulking' and these are the feelings of disappointment or anger. The person who feels disappointed thinks, 'I am a person in an unfortunate situation', which is subtly different from the sulker who thinks, 'Poor me for receiving such treatment'. The person who expresses their annoyance in anger thinks, 'This is frustrating and I am going to tell somebody and do something about it'. Anger can at times be inappropriate, but if expressed carefully can help to identify and resolve problems. A healthier philosophy is based on the following key beliefs:

1. It is undesirable to be treated unfairly, but it is not awful.
2. I can stand this hurt and frustration and I can try to do something about the situation.
3. I accept how the other person is. They may not have been rejecting me as a whole person but rather just one aspect of my behaviour
4. It is best to openly express my feelings; the consequences will not be as bad as I think.

## Tactics for overcoming sulking

1. Look at the advantages and disadvantages of sulking. Advantages might include, 'It lets him know that I'm angry', 'I feel more in control'. Disadvantages might be, 'It hides and avoids dealing with the real problem', 'It has a negative effect on our relationship'.
2. Understand why you sulk. Think back to your childhood. Were you allowed to express your feelings openly, were you encouraged to be assertive?
3. Analyse one specific episode of sulking at a time. Identify the most prominent feeling, eg, anger, disappointment, hurt. Pinpoint the aspect of the situation that you were most hurt by. Try to put into words and formulate in your own mind your interpretation of what happened, how you felt, and what you would like to be different.
4. Express those negative feelings. Use the three- part assertive message. (1) 'I don't like it when you . . . ' (2) 'It makes me feel . (3) 'I would like it if
5. Challenge unconstructive thinking patterns, particularly the overuse of the words 'should', 'ought' and 'must' and for your tendency to 'awfulise', and use 'all or nothing thinking'.

<b>MEN</b>	<b>WOMEN</b>
Men offer solutions to problems, wanting to achieve results.	Women want to share feelings and discuss difficulties.
Men's talk is concerned with exhibiting knowledge, passing on information, preserving status and independence.	In women's talk the emphasis is on displaying similarity, establishing connections, and creating intimacy.
Men tend to think, internally and express the finished product of their thoughts.	Women tend to think aloud, sharing their inner dialogue.

## Communication in Relationships

Communication is the life-blood of any relationship, without effective communication a relationship will wither and die. In the same way, a young baby's growth and development can be drastically arrested if denied human interaction and quality communication. Good communication consists of three essential skills.

- Listening to what the other person is saying. -
- Expressing how you feel and what you think.
- Accepting the other person's opinions and feelings even when they are different from your own.

### **1. Listening**

Effective listening is an active, not passive, skill made up of a number of set components. The quality of our listening greatly affects the nature of the speaker's communication.

Five key listening skills

- Look at the person speaking.
- Be encouraging. Say, 'yes', 'hmmn', nod your head.
- Do not interrupt — be patient.
- Use open-ended questions. Say, 'how do you feel?' and not 'do you feel sad?'
- Reflect back and paraphrase the speaker's emotions and meanings, eg, 'You must feel angry'.

### **2. Communication spoilers**

Behavioural scientists have identified particular types of communication spoilers which can have a negative effect on conversation.

Five key communication spoilers

- Judging, blaming, criticising or moralising.
- Name calling or put downs
- + Interrupting
- Excessive questioning, using closed questions
- Offering solutions and solving problems rather than listening.

### **3. Healthy communication**

- Relationships are most healthy when both parties can openly and assertively express themselves.
- You accept that your partner can never be the same as you in the way he or she feels or thinks about things. Accepting how your partner is and tolerating the differences, and the resulting frustration, is an essential key for relationships to flourish.

#### 4 How to get your message across

Timing	Choose the right time and place. Not when you are very busy or tired. Make a special time.
Be concise	Stick to the issues. Do not lengthily trawl through old stale issues or nag.
Use the 'unselfish I' word	Beginning with 'I' shows that you accept full responsibility. Say 'I feel . . . or I think . . .', and not, 'You make me feel'.
Three-part assertive message	Describe: the behaviour; your feelings; and the effects, eg, 'When you leave your clothes on the floor, I feel annoyed, because it makes extra work. I would like it if . . .'
Choose the right words	Be positive. Avoid the tendency to insult, threaten or denigrate. Be honest but tactful. If you have to criticise others, criticise their actions not their character.
Keep your partner involved.	Make your point and encourage your partner to react. Keep in touch, listen to him or her.
Make notes	Beforehand, jot down the points you want to make.

#### 5 Gender differences in communication?

We might get angry with our partner because he or she does not communicate in the same way. But it has been suggested that men and women are fundamentally different in the way they communicate. Discuss these differences, if indeed they exist, with your partner.

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