**Assertiveness Training**

Definition

[Assertiveness](http://www.minddisorders.com/knowledge/Assertiveness.html) training is a form of behaviour therapy designed to help people stand up for themselves—to empower themselves, in more contemporary terms. Assertiveness is a response that seeks to maintain an appropriate balance between passivity and aggression. Assertive responses promote fairness and equality in human interactions, based on a positive sense of respect for self and others.

Assertiveness training has a decades-long history in mental health and personal growth groups, going back to the [women's movement](http://www.minddisorders.com/knowledge/Feminist_movement.html) of the 1970s. The approach was introduced to encourage women to stand up for themselves appropriately in their interactions with others, particularly as they moved into graduate and the workplace in greater numbers. The original association of assertiveness training with the women's movement in the United States grew out of the discovery of many women in the movement that they were hampered by their inability to be assertive. Today, assertiveness training is used as part of communication training in settings as diverse as schools, corporate boardrooms, and [psychiatric](http://www.minddisorders.com/knowledge/Psychiatry.html) hospitals, for programs as varied as substance abuse treatment, [**social skills training**](http://www.minddisorders.com/Py-Z/Social-skills-training.html), vocational programs, and responding to harassment.

Description

Assertiveness training is often included within other programs, but "stand-alone" programs in self-assertion are often given in women's centres or college counselling centres. Corporate programs for new personnel sometimes offer assertiveness training as part of communication or teamwork groups, or as part of a program on sexual harassment.

1. Assertiveness training typically begins with an information-gathering exercise in which participants are asked to think about and list the areas in their life in which they have difficulty asserting themselves. Very often they will notice specific situations or patterns of behaviour that they want to focus on during the course.
2. The next stage in assertive training is usually role-plays designed to help participants practice clearer and more direct forms of communicating with others. The role-plays allow for practice and repetition of the new techniques, helping each person learn assertive responses by acting on them. Feedback is provided to improve the response, and the role-play is repeated.
3. Eventually, each person is asked to practice assertive techniques in everyday life, outside the training setting. Role-plays usually incorporate specific problems for individual participants, such as difficulty speaking up to an overbearing boss; setting limits to intrusive friends; or stating a clear preference about dinner to one's spouse. Role-plays often include examples of aggressive and passive responses, in addition to the assertive responses, to help participants distinguish between these extremes as they learn a new set of behaviours.
4. Assertiveness training promotes the use of "I" statements as a way to help individuals express their feelings and reactions to others. A commonly used model of an "I" statement is "when you \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, I feel \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_", to help the participant describe what they see the other person as doing, and how they feel about that action. "I" statements are often contrasted with "you" statements, which are usually not received well by others. For example, "When you are two hours late getting home from work, I feel both anxious and angry," is a less accusing communication than "You are a selfish and inconsiderate jerk for not telling me you would be two hours late." Prompts are often used to help participants learn new communication styles. This approach helps participants learn new ways of expressing themselves as well as how it feels to be assertive.

Learning specific techniques and perspectives, such as ***self-observation skills***, ***awareness of personal preferences*** and ***assuming personal responsibility*** are important components of the assertiveness training process. Role-play and practice help with self-observation, while making lists can be a helpful technique for exploring personal preferences for those who may not have a good sense of their own needs and desires. Participants may be asked to list anything from their ten favourite movies or pieces of music to their favourite foods, places they would like to visit, subjects that interest them, and so on.