

## Skill Builders

# Being Assertive

### Activity Overview

**Time required**

30 minutes

**Materials**

Newsprint or dry erase board

Markers

Handout, *Communicating Clearly*

**Purpose**

Participants can practice being assertive in health-related situations.

**When to use**

After you have done an activity in which participants discuss touching, sexuality, or making healthy choices

### In this activity you will...

- Lead a discussion using a handout (10 minutes).
- Ask participant to get into groups of three, discuss a scenario, and report back (15 minutes).
- Lead a discussion to summarize the topic (5 minutes).

### Instructions

Ask the group to identify some situations that could happen in the free world or in prison that could be risky to their health or that involves them doing something they don't want to do. Emphasize that they're not sharing personal information—these are situations that could happen to anyone. Give them an example: your partner wants to have sex and you want to use a condom. If the group has trouble coming up with examples, you can use the scenarios at the end of this activity\*, but it's best if they can come up with their own. On newsprint, write a few key words for each scenario.

Tell the participants that they'll work in groups to come up with assertive ways to deal with these situations; explain that being assertive means communicating strongly and respectfully about your needs or wishes.

Make the following points in your own words:

- There are times when people are sure of their decision(s). However, they may not be able to communicate this to others. That is particularly difficult with the people we care about or love the most.
- People learn how to communicate mostly from watching and listening to family members, friends, and neighbors. In some cultures, it is acceptable to speak loudly and directly when asking for what you want. In other cultures, it is more acceptable to speak in a soft and quiet tone of voice while indirectly asking for what you want.
- People from the same culture may learn different ways to communicate their feelings. This is especially true between men and women. In general, men communicate more aggressively. Women tend to be more passive when asking for what they want or need.

Ask the group: How did you learn to communicate within your families? Take a few responses.

Ask participants to think about a time when they had trouble saying "no" to a partner, friend, or relative. Ask the participants: Has anyone ever had a hard time asking a partner, friend, or relative for a favor? Take a few responses.

Tell the participants that sometimes it is difficult to say "no" to someone we love. Sometimes it is hard to ask for a favor because we do not want to be turned down. Being assertive can help us get what we want and need without being pushy or hurting others.

Hand out *Communicating Clearly*. Go over with the group.

Break the group up into groups of three. Assign each group one scenario. You can do this by tearing each scenario from the newsprint and giving it to the group, or you can number them on the newsprint and assign each group a scenario by number. If you don't have enough scenarios to give one to each group, you can have more than one group work on the same scenario, or use the additional ones listed at the end of this activity.

Tell them that their task is to come up with an assertive response to their scenario. They can use either the 3-step process or an "I statement" or both.

Give the groups 5 minutes and then ask each group to report back. The other groups should listen to see if the response is assertive; if they think it's not, they should try to improve it.

After all the groups have reported, tell them that now you want them to act out their scenario. One person will act out the friend or partner in the situation and another person

will demonstrate being assertive. The third person will observe and coach the assertive person if she needs help.

After 5 minutes, reconvene the group and lead a discussion about the following questions:

What did you learn when you were the observer?

How did it feel being assertive?

What was it like to be the partner and have someone be assertive?

How easy/hard do you think it will be for you to be assertive outside of this classroom?

Congratulate everyone and encourage them to continue practicing assertiveness

## Wrap Up

*Make the following points:*

- Being assertive can be very challenging, but will lead to better and more open, honest communication.
- When someone is behaving assertively, they stand up for what they want or need without hurting other people or denying others' rights.
- By using an assertive communication style, a person is likely to feel more self-respect during the event and afterwards. It also helps a person feel confident.
- Assertive communication also helps the *other* person feel respected and less likely to feel hurt or humiliated.

*\*Scenarios to use if the group has difficulty coming up with some:*

- An old friend shows up at your door and you're really glad to see him. After a few minutes of talking, he asks if you want to get high.
- You're about to have sex with (current partner, new partner, whomever) and you pull out a condom. Your partner says, "Put that away! I don't want anything between us!"
- You're with a group of old friends and they're sharing needles. You say, "No, thanks," and one of them starts giving you a hard time about that.
- You're with a new partner you really like, and the feeling is mutual. Things start to get hot and heavy, and you don't have a condom with you.

# Communicating Clearly (Handout)

## Three (3) ways to communicate:

PASSIVE = allowing other people to meet their needs, while not meeting own needs

AGGRESSIVE = meeting own needs, even if it means trampling on others' rights

ASSERTIVE = meeting own needs, while not taking others' rights from them

## Tips to assertive communication

A 3-step process

To assert our own rights, while not trampling on other people's rights, we can practice the following:

Step one: Clearly state your position.

Step two: Offer a reason or explanation.

Step three: Acknowledge the other person's feelings.

## "I" statements

One useful tool we can use to communicate assertively is an "I" statement. This allows you to take ownership and make your feelings known, without the other person getting defensive.

The formula for "I" statements is this:

"When you \_\_\_\_\_ (describe the behavior)"

"I feel \_\_\_\_\_ (name the feeling)"

Then shut up and LISTEN.

## Examples of "I" statements:

**Instead of:**

"You hurt my feelings,"

**Try:**

"When you ignore me, I feel hurt."

**Instead of:**

"You're such a jerk!"

**Try:**

"When you slam the door and walk out, I feel frustrated."