

Assertiveness Workshop Outline

Jeff E. Brooks-Harris, Ph.D.

Counseling and Student Development Center
University of Hawai'i at Manoa

Goal: To help participants recognize their own patterns of communication and to increase their comfort with and use of assertive communication and behavior.

Group Size: Ten to twenty participants would be ideal.

Time Required: One to two hours depending on the amount of time used to experiment and practice.

Materials: Handouts; Signs for the four corners exercise.

Physical Setting: A room large enough for participants to move around during the four corners exercise.

Workshop Outline:

1. Introductions and Overview of Program
2. Assimilating and Conceptualizing: Definitions
 - Distribute "Assertiveness Definitions" handout
 - Definitions for Assertive, Passive, Aggressive, and Passive Aggressive should be read from the handout. Participants can be asked to read the definitions out loud.
 - After each definition is read, ask participants to think about their own behavior and write down at least one personal example of situations in which they typically act assertively, passively, aggressively, etc.
3. Reflecting on Experience: Four Corners Sorting Exercise
 1. Post signs on the four corners of the room that read, "Assertive," "Passive," "Aggressive," and "Passive Aggressive."
 2. Describe different situations and ask participants to move to one of the corners of the room based on how they would probably act in that situation.

3. After everyone has chosen a corner, you can ask someone from each corner to give an example of an action that would constitute that type of behavior (assertion, passivity, etc.). If you think someone is mislabeling their behavior, you can discuss the discrepancy (e.g., "What makes you think that that behavior is aggressive?").
4. Example situations include:
 - a. Your friend offers to give you a ride and is half an hour late.
 - b. Your friend offers to give you a ride to a job interview and is half an hour late and you miss the interview.
 - c. The person who lives in the next room is playing their stereo loud enough that you can't study.
 - d. You are in line at the movies and some people cut in line in front of you.
 - e. You have a new boyfriend or girlfriend who you really like but you don't really like the way they kiss.
 - f. You get a "C" on an essay test but you think you deserve a "B."
 - g. Your parents decide they don't want to help pay your tuition next semester because they are going to go on a cruise.
 - h. You are in a restaurant and your food is not hot enough.

4. Reflecting on Experience: Areas for Personal Assertiveness

- Have participants identify and write down one area in which they currently tend to act passively, aggressively, or passive-aggressively in which they would like to learn to act more assertively.
- Have each participant share their area for improvement. In a small group, you may be able to have all participants share with the whole group. With a larger group, participants can break into groups of two or three and share with one another.

5. Assimilating and Conceptualizing: Types of Assertion

- Distribute "Types of Assertion" handout
- Definitions and examples of different types of assertion should be read from the handout. Participants can be asked to read the definitions and examples out loud.

6. Experimenting and Practicing: Role Play Practice

- Ask for volunteers to help practice some of these assertion skills. When a participant agrees to do a role play, have them come forward to the front of the room. Ask them what situation they would like to role play and which skills from "Types of Assertion" they would like to practice in this situation. Identify other participants to play different

roles. The facilitator should direct the action and may make suggestions if the volunteer gets stuck.

- After the role play, ask for positive feedback from the other participants (e.g., "What did you like about the way Juan dealt with the situation?"). After positive feedback you can ask for other suggestions (e.g., "Can you think of any other strategies that Juan could have used?").

7. Planning for Application: Action Plan

- Have participants identify and write down specific assertive techniques from "Types of Assertion" that they would like to use in one or more specific situation in the coming week.
- Have each participant share their action plan. In a small group, you may be able to have all participants share with the whole group. With a larger group, participants can break into groups of two or three and share their action plan with one another.

8. Questions and Answers / Discussion

- Ask participants if they have any other questions or comments about assertiveness or about how to use assertion in different situation.

Jeff Brooks-Harris is a psychologist at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa's Counseling and Student Development Center.

Copyright © 1997 Jeff E. Brooks-Harris. Permission is granted to copy and use this material for educational and non-profit purposes only. This copyright statement and acknowledgement of authorship should remain intact on materials you copy from this website.