

Appropriate Assertiveness

Objectives:	To explore the differences between aggressive, passive and assertive behaviours. To learn the formula for "I" Statements. To develop and practise the skill of active listening.
Session Times:	2 ½ hours: Sections A–F 1 ½ hours: Sections A, D, E 1 hour: Section D
Essential Background:	The Win/Win Approach

Sections:	A. Distinguishing between Aggressive, Passive and Assertive Behaviour	4.3
	B. Understanding our Responses to Conflict	4.4
	C. Needs and Rights	4.5
	D. "I" Statements	4.6
	E. After an "I" Statement: Where to Next?	4.13
	F. Additional Assertiveness Activities	4.15
Activities:	React or Respond	A.4.1
	Creating a Bill of Assertive Rights	A.4.3
	Formulating "I" Statements	A.4.5
	Experiencing the Difference between Aggressive and Assertive Styles	A.4.7
	Broken Record Technique	A.4.9



Handouts:	Section A:	Will you React or Respond?	H.4.1
		Fight, Flight, Flow	H.4.2
	Section C:	A Bill of Assertive Rights	H.4.3
	Section D:	"I" Statements	H.4.4



Appropriate Assertiveness

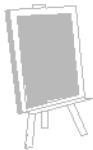
Saying How it is from My Side

A. Distinguishing between Aggressive, Passive and Assertive Behaviour

(25 minutes)

Question: Think of a recent conflict. How did you respond?

Discussion: Ask participants to write down their answers. Then write them on the board as a basis for discussion. Ask participants if they can group types of behaviour e.g. withdrawing, changing the subject, walking away – flight etc. As these emerge from your discussion, identify and write on the board:



BEHAVIOURS:

Fight

Flight

Flow

Link this discussion with the material covered in Chapter 1. Win/Win Approach.

Question: When we're about to behave in "fight" mode, do we have different physical and thought reactions than those we have when we're about to react in "flight" mode?

Acknowledge responses from participants.

If we're able to recognise these reactions, we may then be able to choose a different and often more appropriate behaviour in response to the conflict.

*If there's time for more detailed teaching, consider the material pp.6–22 Helena Cornelius and Shoshana Faire, **Everyone Can Win** 2nd edition. (Sydney: Simon & Schuster (Australia) P/L, 2006),*

Group Activity: ***React or Respond:** participants complete a **handout: "Will you React or Respond?"** to raise their awareness of the physical and mental components of their reaction to conflict. (See *Appropriate Assertiveness Activities* page A.4.1)*
(15 minutes)

*Give out the **handout: "Fight, Flight, Flow"** to highlight the differences between each approach.*



B. Understanding our Responses to Conflict

(15 minutes)

Question: What is your most usual response to conflict?

Question: Are there times and places when you respond in one way, and others when you respond in another? What are they? What influences this pattern of response?

Reflection: Ask participants to write their answers down and then to reflect on the reasons they behave that way. The trainer reads a series of questions, pausing briefly between each, to help focus this reflection.

If **Fight** is your most frequent response, ask yourself:

- Why do I need to be in control?
- How would I feel if I found out I was wrong?
- Do I make myself feel good by proving that I am better than others?
- Do I feel that everyone ought to have the same values as me?
- Should I perhaps question some of my own opinions?
- What's not working for me anymore?

If **Flight** is the way you mostly respond, ask yourself:

- Do I really think the other person doesn't suspect I'm upset?
- What damage to the relationship is my withdrawal doing?
- Is it fear, habit or anger that prevents me from speaking?
- Are my feelings as important as the other person's?
- Am I frightened of the other person's anger, or of damaging the relationship?
- What's the worst that can happen if I speak?

If **Flow** is the way you'd like to respond more often, ask yourself:

- Do I have needs and rights which I need to acknowledge?
- Do I need to become more aware of the needs and rights of others?
- Do I need to develop my skills in explaining more clearly what I need and what I deserve?



C. Needs and Rights

(15 minutes)

Question: Are there times in your life when you feel you're not as assertive as you would like to be?

Question: How do you feel afterwards as a result of not being assertive?

Discussion: Draw out participants' responses. In addition, you might explore:

- cheated
- trodden on
- taken advantage of
- Over-ridden.

It may be that we're lacking a skill: we just don't know how to be assertive in that situation or setting. Or it may be that we don't have a clear idea about our needs in the situation.

Question: Why might we not have a clear idea about our needs in the situation?

Discussion: Draw out participants' responses. In addition, you might explore:

- We may never have been encouraged to identify our own needs.
- We may be so used to thinking about others' needs, that we never stop to think of our own.
- There may be messages from our past that lead us to think that it's selfish to consider our own needs.

Becoming aware of our needs in a situation is a fundamental step in becoming appropriately assertive. Knowing what our needs are doesn't mean that we have to demand that they be met. Rather, it means we can make more reasoned choices about appropriate action. We may want to negotiate to have these needs met in the situation, or we may seek to have them met in some other way or in some other setting. We may become clear about the priority of our needs – perhaps some have to be met now, whereas others can be put on hold for a while. We may choose in some situations to attend to others' needs first; or in such a case, perhaps in meeting someone else's needs, we may be meeting one of our own superordinate needs. (For example, parents will meet their baby's need for food, not satisfying their own need for sleep, but perhaps satisfying a superordinate need to be a good parent.)

To help us acknowledge what our needs are, it can be helpful to have a sense of what it is reasonable and fair for us to expect in a situation. We may be aware often of others' claims on us and what they deserve and need, but we may not have a framework of RIGHTS for ourselves.



Question: What's our understanding of the term "right"?

Discussion: Draw out participants' responses. In addition, you might offer a definition: "that which is due to anyone by just claim" from **The Macquarie Essential Dictionary** (Macquarie Library, 1999).

There are a variety of rights: legal, moral, human. What we're talking about here are rights which arise from the conventions of interpersonal communication: what it is reasonable for us to expect in our relationships and in our communications with others. Having a sense of what our rights are may help us to feel that our needs are valid and it is therefore appropriate that we seek to have them met.

Conclude by distributing and discussing the **handout: "A Bill of Assertive Rights"** or by doing the following activity.

Group Activity: **Creating A Bill of Assertive Rights:** participants identify situations in which they find it difficult to be assertive and then work out their rights in these situations. (See *Appropriate Assertiveness Activities* page A.4.3)

(30 minutes)

D. "I" Statements

(45 minutes)

Question: Think of a recent occasion when you wanted to let someone else know that you were unhappy or dissatisfied with something. What did you want to say?

Ask participants to write down what they wanted to say.

Question: Why is it difficult to say some things to one person and yet not to another?

Discussion: Draw out participants' responses. In addition, you might consider:

- inappropriate time and situation
- type of relationship
- difficulty finding a tactful way to express it
- fear of the other person becoming defensive or abusive.

There are lots of ways that we can respond to conflict. Sometimes it's appropriate to withdraw, and deal with the issue in some other way or at another time. Sometimes we have legitimate needs and rights to which we want to stay true while acknowledging that others also have needs and rights.

Frequently, the tricky part is knowing how to express what we're feeling to another person so that person does not become defensive.



When we're in conflict, it's often as if we're standing in two rooms across a corridor. Each of us is protected and safe in our own room and every so often we lean out and throw abuse, or tell the other person what he or she needs to do to fix the situation. For example "If you arrived on time, then we wouldn't have these problems" or "If you weren't so lazy, then things would run smoothly".

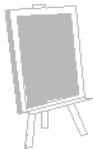
The problem with this is we often don't make any progress solving the problem. We just stay locked in our own rooms with our own ideas, that we're right and the other person is wrong.

So, what we need is a bridge across the corridor, to move us into the same room to start talking. We need an opener for a conversation with the other person.

Question: **Are some of you familiar with the concept of an "I" statement?**

An "I" statement is like a recipe with three main ingredients. You'll come across a number of variations. Here's our preferred one:

Write on the board:



The Action

My Response

My Preferred Outcome

The quality of the ingredients is what determines the flavour of the final product. Similarly, just how effective an "I" statement is, will depend on the quality of these ingredients.

Expand on each of these ingredients as follows:

THE ACTION

Imagine we're trying to make a point in a meeting, or to tell a story, or present an argument, and we find that we can't complete it because someone else keeps "interrupting". In fact, this person frequently "interrupts" us. (*"Interrupting" is in inverted commas because it is only one person's interpretation of the event.*)

Question: **How might we feel about this?**

Discussion: *Draw out participants' responses. In addition, you might consider:*

- angry
- frustrated
- upset.



Depending on how upset we are, and how important the issue is to us, we may decide to "tackle" or "confront" the other person. (Note words like tackle or confront, imply some type of battle. They come from a win/lose perspective.)

We might say something like: "I'm sick of you interrupting me" or "I want you to stop interrupting me" or "Whenever I start talking, you interrupt me and never let me finish".

Question: **How is the other person likely to react to such statements?**

Discussion: *Draw out participants' responses. In addition, you might consider:*

- become defensive
- start to attack
- retreat
- apologise and leave it unresolved.

Question: **What are the main messages of such statements?**

Discussion: *Draw out participants' responses. In addition, you might explore:*

- The other person is wrong.
- It's nothing to do with me, it's all your fault.
- If you'd behave differently, everything would be OK.
- I'm OK you're not.

If we're wanting to build a bridge so we can start talking with another person, then statements that blame and accuse are not likely to work. We need to find a different way of communicating our concerns.

Question: **How could we construct a statement which begins with a non-blaming description of this difficulty?**

Discussion: *If participants are able to give appropriate examples, use the information below to highlight the structure of the examples. If they are having difficulties, provide this information first to assist them.*

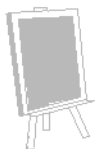
To do this, it's useful to think of the following:

What we're trying to achieve is an "objective description".

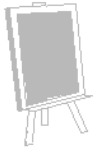
Add the words:

The Action

**Objective
Description**



A way to do this is to start our statement with the word "when".

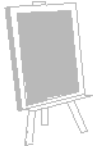


Add the word:

The Action	Objective Description	When...
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and to try not to use emotive language like "interrupt" or the word "you".

Add the crossed out word:



The Action	Objective Description	When...
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Add the word:



Often, as soon as people hear "you", they feel they are being accused, so they want to protect themselves. It's often difficult for people to hear what's wrong with them, but not so hard to hear what's not working for the person speaking.

Consider further alternatives offered by participants. You might then give the following example:

"When I'm not able to finish what I'm saying..."

This is a clean statement of how I perceive the event or the action, and is not burdened with value or emotional judgement.

MY RESPONSE

Often, when something has happened to upset us, the other person is unaware of how we feel. He or she may simply not realise that his or her actions are irritating us.

Saying how we feel gives valuable information to the other person. In some cases the other person will respond with an offer to do something different. If the conflict is entrenched, or it's over an issue that is significant to both, it may not be that simple.

When we feel angry, we often want to blame the other person for the pain, the inconvenience or the annoyance, and our tendency is to make the other person responsible for how we feel.

For example, "You make me so angry".



Question: How might the other person react to this?

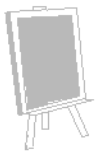
Discussion: Draw out participants' responses. In addition, you might consider:

- feel defensive
- think it's unfair
- feel guilty.

Question: Instead, how could I give an accurate statement of my response?

Discussion: Depending on the responses of participants, give them the following information to guide or to summarise:

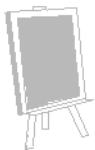
A key to describing our response clearly is to ensure that we don't blame the other person.



Add the words.

My Response **No Blame**

and it is helpful to start this part of the statement with the words "I feel" to describe our feelings or "I feel like" to describe what we want to do.



Add the words:

My Response **No Blame** **I feel**
or
I feel like

Consider further alternatives offered by participants. You might then give the following example:

"When I'm not able to finish what I'm saying, **I feel** frustrated..."

or

"...**I feel like** leaving the meeting..."

"I feel like" or "I want to" is a more appropriate response in some settings. Or, if we're having difficulty working out just how we feel, we may find it easier to identify what we feel like doing.

To say how we feel without blaming the other person contributes to building empathy. It sometimes also pushes us to explore our response. Under our anger or our upset there may be other feelings such as "overburdened" or "unacknowledged". If we just continue to blame the other person, then we may have lost the opportunity to identify these feelings, our needs, and the change we want.



MY PREFERRED OUTCOME

When we raise an issue with another person, knowing what outcome we want can give direction to further discussion.

However, let's take care in how we define "outcome". We don't want the other person to feel backed into a corner, or that we're unwilling to negotiate.

Sometimes, when we're upset, we become focused on the other person fixing the situation.

Thinking of our example again, we may be tempted to say: "...and I want you to keep quiet until I've finished".

Question: How might the other person react to this?

Discussion: Draw out participants' response. In addition, you might consider:

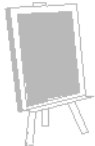
- might agree
- might rebel
- might submit begrudgingly.

Question: How could I, instead, say what I wanted without expecting the other person to fix it?

Discussion: Depending on the responses of participants, give them the following information to guide or to summarise.

It's important in stating our preferred outcome not to place any **demand** on the other person.

Add the words.

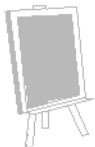


My Preferred Outcome

No Demand

and it's helpful to start this part of the statement with the words "**And what I'd like is that I...**"

Add the words.



My Preferred Outcome

No Demand

And what I'd like is that I...

Consider alternatives offered by participants. You might then give the following example:

"When I'm not able to finish what I'm saying, I feel frustrated, **and what I'd like is that** I am able to complete all I want to say".



The sentence created should be able to be paraphrased as "And what I'd like is that I am able to..." These exact words may be clumsy in some situations, but the implied meaning should be there.

Outcome, in this sense, is a broad idea of how I want the situation to be. It reflects my needs but it doesn't specify a solution. By leaving it open, it leaves space for the other person to give his/her side of the story before settling on a solution; or in more complex issues before negotiating to decide on a solution.

(In this case, if it was a meeting setting, examples of possible solutions could be:

- making sure each person says all that he/she wants to say without interruption
- setting a time limit for each person
- establishing a protocol for interruption e.g. raising a hand
- ensuring that, after an interruption, attention returns to the original speaker etc.)

Ask participants to refer back to the statements they wrote down at the beginning of this section.

Question: Do the statements you wrote down at the beginning of this section include any of these elements?

Give participants a moment or two to look over their statements.

Group Activity: **Formulating "I" Statements:** working in groups of three, participants practise constructing "I" statements. (*See Appropriate Assertiveness Activities p A.4.5.*) (40 minutes)

Give out the **handout: "I" Statements"**

Important Points to Cover:

As we become proficient in making "I" statements, we can rely less on the formula and still include the main elements of speaking:

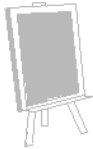
- from my perspective, using "I" language not "you" language
- as objectively as possible
- without blaming
- without demanding.

"I" statements can still be delivered when we are highly emotional, in the midst of a heated argument. They are likely to do less damage to the long term relationship than a "you" statement.



It takes practice to construct "I" statements with ease. It also takes practice to deliver them without them sounding stilted and clumsy.

This is partly because we need to find words that are right for each of us and which incorporate these three elements. As well, whenever we learn a new skill, it doesn't seem natural at first. With practice, however, new skills become automatic. Think of driving a car, for instance.



Write the following model of the four stages of learning on the board:

- **Unconsciously unskilled** – When you're not even aware that you don't have a particular skill.
- **Consciously unskilled** – When you become conscious that there is a skill (e.g. driving) which you can acquire (when you're older).
- **Consciously skilled** – When you first learn a skill (driving) and it takes all your concentration to perform it.
- **Unconsciously skilled** – When you have become so proficient at the skill (of driving) that you no longer have to concentrate on it. You do it automatically, which frees you up to focus on the particular situation (in this case, the road, the traffic etc.)

So it is with "I" Statements. With practice we become unconsciously skilled in the formula of an "I" Statement and we can concentrate on the feelings and events of the moment.

E. After an "I" Statement: Where to Next?

(15 minutes)

Question: When we make an "I" Statement how can we gauge the other person's response?

Discussion: *Draw out participants' responses. In addition, you might consider:*

- facial expression
- body language for signs of tension and discomfort
- active listening.

Question: Why might an "I" Statement not be well received?

Discussion: *Draw out participants' responses. In addition, you might explore:*

- The other person has issues relating to this topic which need to be addressed. (*See Chapter 7. Willingness to Resolve.*)
- The "I" statement may not have been constructed as cleanly or clearly as intended; or it may sound stilted and insincere; or it might sound too subjective.



- The underlying intent may have been to blame. Even though the verbal message may have taken an "I" statement form, the body language and tone of voice may have conveyed another message.

Question: **After we've delivered an "I" Statement, if the other person becomes defensive or doesn't make an offer to contribute to a solution, what can we do?**

Discussion: *Draw out participants' responses. In addition, you might explore.*

- active listen to that person's view of the situation
- check our intent
- centre ourselves
- construct another "I" statement, perhaps this time about our need to have the situation addressed
- point out the consequences of not addressing the situation
- indicate what our solution will be, if the other person is not willing to contribute to a solution
- try another CR tool.

During discussion that follows an "I" Statement, it can be useful to cover these points:

- Be clear on the outcome and flexible on the route. Let go of a particular position or idea in response to new information from the other person.
- Put aside judgements. Often we feel someone "should" or "shouldn't" do something. This can inhibit finding a solution.
- Deal with our own desire to blame. Instead, focus on our own feelings to uncover their source. People find it difficult to hear criticisms of themselves. They find it much easier to hear how we are feeling about a situation.
- Focus on the good purpose. It can help reduce our own negativity if we remind ourselves that in many cases, people are not setting out to hurt us. They have good intentions in what they did, or they just may not have considered what impact their actions would have on us. The good purpose does not necessarily justify what went wrong, but understanding it may change the emotional climate.



F. Additional Assertiveness Activities

(30minutes)

Experiencing the Difference Between Aggressive and Assertive

Styles: *working in pairs, participants gain a felt sense of the difference between aggressive and assertive behaviour. (See Appropriate Assertiveness Activities page A.4.7)* (30 minutes)

Broken Record Technique: *many people find it difficult to maintain an assertive response when under pressure from another person. Working in pairs participants practise this skill. (See Appropriate Assertiveness Activities page A.4.9.)*

(20 minutes)



Appropriate Assertiveness Activities

React or Respond

Trainers' Information Only

Context:	When faced with conflicts, there are physical, mental, emotional and behavioural components to our reaction. Becoming aware of these components helps people choose a better response. (See <i>Chapter 4, Appropriate Assertiveness, Section A. p 4.3 and Helena Cornelius and Shoshana Faire, Everyone Can Win 2nd edition. (Sydney: Simon & Schuster (Australia) P/L, 2006), pp.6–22.</i>)
Time:	15 minutes
Aims:	To identify physical and mental components of our reaction to conflict To consider how our reaction can be transformed into an appropriate response.
Handout:	<i>"Will You React or Respond?"</i>

Instructions: We're going to complete a handout to consider what happens physically and in our thoughts when we react to conflict both in "fight" and in "flight". When we've completed the handout we'll discuss what we notice with a partner.

*Give out the **handout: "Will you React or Respond?"***

Think for a moment about ways that you behave in "fight" mode. What happens physically and what thoughts run through your mind when you're about to behave in these ways? Write your answers down on the handout.

If some participants seem to be having difficulty add:

Perhaps you might feel certain muscles becoming tense, particularly those around your jaw and neck. Maybe you feel an adrenalin rush. You might say to yourself "I'll show him"; "I'll put her in her place"; "He's always a pain"; or "It's her fault".

Allow 3–5 minutes.

Now, think for a moment about ways that you behave in "flight" mode. What happens physically, and what thoughts run through your mind just before you behave in these ways? Write your answers down on the handout.



As before, prompt, if necessary, with:

Perhaps you feel nauseous or your head aches: or you feel tense around your shoulders; or your breathing is shallow. Maybe you say: "This always happens to me" or "I guess I'm wrong again" or "I'll just keep out of her way" or "It's not worth making a fuss".

Allow a further 3–5 minutes.

When you become aware of the physical and mental signs that you're about to behave in "fight" or "flight", what could you do to respond more appropriately, and to "flow" instead?

Allow 3–5 minutes.

Pair Discussion: *Ask participants to talk about what they identified.*

Discussion: Are there differences in what happens physically and mentally when you're about to behave in "fight" to when you're about to behave in "flight?" (*Often people comment that the physical signs are very similar, but the thoughts associated with each are quite different.*)

How easy or difficult was it to identify the physical and thought components that precede your behaviour? Why is that?

If you could become more aware of these components, do you think it might affect the way you behave in conflict? In what ways?

If you noticed these components of your reaction, what could you do to transform them into an appropriate response to conflict? (*After participants have responded, you might add: breathe deeply, relax tensed muscles, state how you feel, take time out to become sufficiently composed to deal with the conflict appropriately, centre.*)



Appropriate Assertiveness Activities

Creating a Bill of Assertive Rights

Trainers' Information Only

Context:	An awareness of what is fair and reasonable for us to expect in our relationships may provide us with a framework in which to be assertive. (See <i>Chapter 4: Appropriate Assertiveness: Section C</i>)
Time:	30 minutes
Aim:	To understand how lack of awareness of our rights in communication prevents us from being assertive To prepare a statement of one's rights.

Instructions: We're going to explore the concept of rights in small groups of three, developing a statement of one right for each participant which we may currently be denying or allowing to be over-ridden.

Divide into small groups of three.

Ask participants to think of situations where they would like to be assertive and find it difficult to be so.

Be ready to offer some examples:

- not getting all your questions adequately answered by a doctor;
- finding it difficult to say "no" to a parent, child, friend or boss;
- not raising with a work colleague, housemate your dissatisfaction with a certain arrangement.

Take turns at describing your situations and then, with the help of the other two in the group, identify your underlying right in this situation. Try to identify a right that can serve as a springboard for acknowledging and stating your own needs.

Remember that any right you claim as your own needs to be extended to others as well. Listeners, remember your active listening skills to help the speaker explore the situation and identify the underlying right.

Allow 15–20 minutes.

Return everyone to the large group.



Discussion: How difficult was it to identify your rights?

What might have made it difficult? *(After participants have responded, you might add: past experience, social, cultural, gender expectations etc.)*

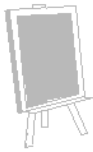
Important Points to Cover:

Any rights we claim as our own, we need to extend to others as their rights also.

Even though we recognise we have a right we may choose not to exercise it (e.g. we may know you have a right to bring up an issue, and may choose not to for a variety of reasons such as inappropriate time or place, to preserve a relationship etc.)

Closing:

Ask participants to take turns reading out their rights.



(Optional) Write up each individual right on the flip chart or ask for a copy of each right, and have them typed on a sheet to be given out at the next session.



Appropriate Assertiveness Activities

Formulating "I" Statements

Trainers' Information Only

Context:	In conflict, it is not easy to describe the difficulty from our perspective, without blaming the other person. "I" statements provide a structure for communicating our points of view. (See <i>Chapter 4, Appropriate Assertiveness, Section D</i>)
Time:	40 minutes
Aim:	To practice formulating "I" statements
Handout:	"I" Statements

Instructions: We'll work, now, in groups of three to formulate "I" statements. Either work on the example you wrote down at the beginning of this section (*refer to Chapter 4. Appropriate assertiveness: Section D*) or choose another current conflict for which an "I" Statement would be relevant.

*Give out the **handout: "I" Statements**.*

Now spend a few minutes trying to construct an "I" Statement.

Allow five minutes.

Now, divide into groups of three. In your groups, take it in turn to describe briefly your situation and to present an "I" Statement. The other two in the group will help to evaluate and polish that "I" Statement. When the group considers the "I" Statement is clean and clear, the next person has a turn.

The trainer can move amongst the groups, checking and offering assistance where needed.

The "I" Statement must be:

Clear – really stating what is the matter

Clean – no direct or implied blame.

Allow 30 minutes



Discussion: Is anyone needing to clarify any aspect of an "I" Statement?

Was one part of the "I" statement more difficult to construct than any other? Which part? Why? *(After participants have responded, you might add: Finding it hard to identify and talk about feelings not blaming not judging etc.)*

Why do these difficulties exist? *(After participants have responded, you might add: upbringing, education, cultural and gender expectations etc.)*

Can anyone see an opportunity for using the "I" Statement you've just formulated? In what way might it be useful?

If you don't choose to deliver your "I" Statement to the relevant person, is there any other way in which it is useful? *(After participants have responded, you might add: clarifying for oneself, releasing emotional energy, letting go.)*

Important Points to Cover:

Sometimes formulating an "I" statement is most useful in clarifying the situation for ourselves, and exploring our own responses. We may then decide to deliver it; or we may decide that a different action is more appropriate.

Non-verbal messages tend to be more powerful than verbal ones. If our listeners perceive an incongruence between what we're saying and our non-verbal cues, they are more likely to believe that the non-verbal messages represent our true feelings and intent. *(Research findings reported in Joseph P Forgas **Interpersonal Communication** (Sydney, Pergamon Press, 1985) p140–141. See also article Tim Connor 2006, **Non-Verbal Messages are More Important than What the Prospect Says** (<http://ezinearticles.com/?Non-Verbal-Messages-Are-More-Important-Than-What-The-Prospect-Says&id=330891>)* Therefore, if our intent is to blame, to accuse or to demand, it is likely that our listeners will perceive this no matter what we say.

If we can't construct a clean "I" Statement, the chances are that our intent is to blame and to accuse. Or even if we have managed to formulate a clean "I" Statement but we know the feeling behind it is to blame, it may be better not to use an "I" Statement but to choose a different conflict-resolving tool.



Appropriate Assertiveness Activities

Experiencing the Difference between Aggressive and Assertive Styles

Trainers' Information Only

Context:	Experiencing aggressive, then assertive, behaviour reinforces learning about these behaviours. (See Chapter 4, <i>Appropriate Assertiveness, Section F</i>)
Time:	30 minutes
Aim:	To gain a felt sense of the difference between aggressive and assertive behaviour

Instructions: In this role play (or demonstration), we will experience the difference between aggressive and assertive behaviour.

Divide the group into pairs with Partners A and B for role plays

or

set up a demonstration by two people (possibly the trainer and one other.)

Choose a situation that is current for one of the players, or provide a scenario with which members of the group would easily be able to identify. Here is an example which you could use:

Sample Situation

You are two work colleagues who need to have regular meetings. Partner A regards punctuality as important and is always ready for the meeting at the scheduled starting time. Partner B frequently arrives for the meeting between five minutes and half an hour after the scheduled starting time.

There will be three rounds and, in each round, we'll play the scene in a different way.

Round 1

Partner A uses an accusing, angry approach and partner B gives a defensive reason.

Allow 3 minutes.



Round 2

Partner A uses an accusing, angry approach and Partner B responds with "I" Statements.

Allow 3 minutes.

Round 3

Partner A uses an "I" Statement which may still express anger to open the discussion, and Partner B responds again with an "I" Statement.

Allow 3 minutes.

Encourage discussion between pairs on how they felt in each role play before debriefing in the large group.

Discussion:

How did both players feel in the three different role plays?

Did responding with an "I" Statement defuse some of the hostility?

Did opening with an "I" Statement lead to a more fruitful discussion?

Did you move closer to resolution in one of the role plays?

What makes a statement aggressive, assertive or passive?



Appropriate Assertiveness Activities

Broken Record Technique

Trainers' Information Only

Context:	It can be difficult to persist in asserting our needs, particularly when someone is placing a lot of pressure on us. (<i>See Chapter 4, Appropriate Assertiveness, Section F</i>)
Time:	20 minutes
Aims:	To learn how to identify what we want and to communicate this assertively To persist in communicating assertively, even when faced with undue pressure, lack of co-operation, resistance from another, etc.

Instructions: It is often difficult to remain assertive when faced with undue pressure or lack of co-operation from another. In this activity, we practise remaining assertive when a partner puts pressure on us.

Divide the group into pairs.

Both people think of a situation in which you find it difficult to remain assertive.

Partner A, you brief partner B on the situation. Partner B, you make it difficult for Partner A to remain assertive.

Partner A, identify a goal and make a clear "I" Statement e.g. "I don't want to work late tonight".

Partner B, you continue to make your request, pressuring Partner A to comply with you.

Partner A, continue to repeat this statement, like a broken record, without picking up on the side issues raised by Partner B (e.g. "I know there are deadlines to be met and I don't want to work late tonight. Let me say it again, I don't want to work late tonight".)

Partner A, you may be prepared to negotiate if the situation is appropriate (e.g. "I don't want to work late tonight. I would be willing to stay back tomorrow".)

Reverse the process. Partner A puts pressure on Partner B, and Partner B remains assertive.



Pair Discussion: Ask pairs to discuss how they felt in the role play.

Discussion: How could you apply this technique in real life situations?

What might make it difficult?

What could you do to overcome these difficulties? *(After participants have responded, you might add: recall "my rights", centre myself, use positive self-talk, mentally enclose the other person in a box so that I feel more separate and protected from their anger or their demands.)*



Will you React or Respond?

When I am about to react in *fight* mode...

Physical reaction:

Thought reaction:

When I am about to react in *flight* mode...

Physical reaction:

Thought reaction:

Ways I could turn these into a *flow response* are:



Fight, Flight, Flow

FIGHT: Aggressive Behaviour (I win/You lose)

Expressing your feelings, needs and ideas at the expense of others; standing up for your rights but ignoring the rights of others; trying to dominate, even humiliate, others.

- Hostile and self-defeating.
- Results in anger, self-righteousness, possible guilt later.

Belief: You don't matter.

Payoff: Vents anger and achieves goals in the short term.

Problem: Alienation from others; feelings of frustration, bitterness and isolation.

FLIGHT: Passive Behaviour (I lose/You win)

Not expressing your own feelings, needs, ideas; ignoring your own rights; allowing others to infringe upon them.

- Inhibited and self-denying.
- Results in anxiety, disappointment, anger and resentment.

Belief: I don't matter.

Payoff: Avoids unpleasant situations.

Problem: Needs are not met; anger builds up; feelings arise of low self-worth.

FLOW: Assertive Behaviour (I win/You win)

Expressing your feelings, needs and ideas. Standing up for your legitimate rights in ways that do not violate the rights of others.

- Expressive and self-enhancing.
- Results in confidence, self-esteem.

Belief: We both matter.

Payoff: Achieves goals mostly. If this does not occur, there are feelings of self-worth which result from being straight forward. Self-confidence improves and relationships become open and honest.

Problem: You still may feel distant from others who don't handle open relationships well or who have great difficulty expressing their needs or those who wish to dominate.



A Bill of Assertive Rights

It is reasonable and proper for me...

- to be treated with respect
 - to hold my own views and have them heard
 - to have my own feelings and have them taken seriously
 - to arrange my own priorities
 - to make mistakes
 - to change my mind
 - to choose not to answer questions that are personal or intrusive
 - to choose when and if to assert myself
 - to define and protect the physical space I need
 - to refuse without feeling guilty
 - to get what I pay for
 - to ask for what I want
 - to be given information (by doctors, lawyers, accountants etc.) without being patronised.
-
-

Any right I claim as my own, I extend to others.



"I" Statements

Aims : To communicate clearly and cleanly my perception of and feelings about a problem without attacking blaming or hurting the other person.
To open a discussion without eliciting defensiveness from the other person.

Example

Complete your own example

The Action	Objective Description	When... you	<i>When... changes to our plans have been finalised before I have a chance to contribute</i>	
My Response	No Blame	I feel... or I feel like...	<i>I feel powerless</i> <i>or</i> <i>I feel like making my own separate plans</i>	
My Preferred Outcome	No Demand	And what I'd like is that I...	<i>And what I'd like is that I have more involvement in the decision-making process.</i>	

Depending on the response of the other person, I will choose an appropriate next action. It may be to make another "I" statement, to active listen, to start discussing the problem in more detail or...



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Appropriate Assertiveness H.4.4