

# How to Set Boundaries and Be Assertive

Human  
**Solutions**  
Humaines



# Introduction



## Assertiveness

- Behavior and communication demonstrating respect for your own and others wants and desires

## Boundaries

- Limitations, rules or guidelines based upon your values, wants and goals

# What are boundaries?



- Rules and expectations that:
  - Govern day-to-day activities between people
  - Govern exchange of information
    - Between self, others, and the environment
- Formal or Informal
- Explicit or Implied

# Examples of boundaries



Turn to the person sitting near you and come up with as many types of boundaries as possible.



# Why don't we set boundaries?



- We feel selfish/bad/guilty/fearful
- We want to avoid conflict or anger
- We don't want to hurt others
- We are afraid of being hurt by others
- We want others to like us
- We don't feel entitled to boundaries
- We feel helpless/hopeless

# Are you....?



- Are you a “people pleaser”?
- Do you feel uncomfortable saying what you think or feel, or communicating what you want or prefer?
- Do you often sacrifice your own well being for others?
- Do you consistently avoid conflict?
- Do you usually let others have their way so they don't feel hurt, angry or disappointed?
- Have you often felt trapped in situations where your values, wants, beliefs, or feelings were not being respected?
- Do you have difficulty respectfully asserting yourself?

# Or are you...?



- Do you act rebelliously, automatically saying, “No” to others?
- Do you often feel angry at others for telling you what to do?
- Do you passively resist doing what others ask you to do, by procrastinating, making frequent mistakes, or making excuses?
- Do you not get along with authority figures?
- Do you get defensive easily, seeing even simple requests as too demanding?
- Do you often feel cheated or that you are giving much more than you receive?

# How to set boundaries



1. Adopt an “I-Count and You-Count” position
2. Accept the guilt and the fear as part of the picture, but don't let them control you
3. Identify your typical response: Do you subjugate or rebel?
4. Change your pattern: Be more assertive if you subjugate, be less reactive, more reflective if you rebel
5. Identify your wants, needs, preferences & opinions



# How to set boundaries



6. Practice sharing them with others
  - Starting with small issues and easy people
  - Work your way up to more difficult ones
7. Identify situations at work and at home where you don't set boundaries
8. Give back to others responsibility for their own, needs, wants, desires
9. Set appropriate limits with the people in your life who continue to resist your legitimate right to set boundaries
10. Remind yourself that setting boundaries improves relationships

# Valuing assertive communication



- An assertive attitude values the expression of feelings
- Assertive behavior involves:
  - Expressing your feelings in a clear fashion
  - Asking for what you want, or
  - Saying No to something you don't want

# What is assertiveness?



- Recognizing and communicating your thoughts, feelings, and wants honestly and appropriately while respecting the thoughts, feelings and wants of others.

# Why behave assertively?



- Your needs, wants and feelings are more likely to be understood
- Nobody's feelings are hurt intentionally
- Both parties are more likely to feel respected and heard
- The relationship is strengthened by the exchange
- You experience fewer negative conflicts and arguments
- You feel in control of your own life
- Your confidence and self-esteem are enhanced
- You have a better chance of getting what you really want.

# Passive behavior



- Always giving in to what others want
- Not wanting to make waves
- Fear of saying no
- Not expressing your thoughts/feelings
- Discount Self, Count Other

# Aggressive behavior



- Direct hostility but thoughts/feelings underneath the anger are unclear.
- Using intimidation and coercion to get what you want
- Acting out angry feelings
- Blaming
- Covering vulnerability
- Reactive style of communication
- Count Self, Discount Other

# Passive-Aggressive behavior



- Indirect, under-the-table hostility
- Aggressive energy is diffused, misdirected, unfocused, and unclear
- You believe you have no power to influence others directly
- Passive-aggressiveness is powerful, however
- Discount Self, Discount Other

# Where does the passive-aggressive behavior fit in?



Only You Count

You Count and I Both Count

Only I Count



**Passive**

**Assertive**

**Aggressive**



# Do you need to be more assertive?



- Do you have difficulty accepting constructive criticism?
- Do you find yourself saying 'yes' to requests that you should really say 'no' to, just to avoid disappointing people?
- Do you have trouble voicing a difference of opinion with others?
- Do people tend to feel alienated by your communication style when you do disagree with them?
- Do you feel attacked when someone has an opinion different from your own?

# Being assertive



- Four Steps (Bourne, 2000)
  - Acknowledge your basic rights
  - Develop non-verbal assertive behaviours
  - Learn to say "No"
  - Practice assertive responses

# Step one:



## Acknowledge your basic rights

- Often, we have forgotten them
- As children we may have been taught not to believe in them
- Examples:
  - I have the right to acknowledge my limitations and say, “No” to requests that I cannot meet
  - I have the right to be treated with dignity and respect

# Step two:



## Develop non-verbal, assertive behavior

- Maintain eye contact
- Maintain an open posture
- Do not back off or move away
- Stay calm

# Step three:



## Learn to Say No

- Acknowledge the other person's request by repeating it
- Explain your reason for declining
- Say "No"
- (Optional) If appropriate, suggest an alternative

# Learning to say YES to yourself and NO to others



- I should have said “NO” when:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Asked me to \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Asked me to \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Asked me to \_\_\_\_\_

Consider a couple of different ways to say NO to an unreasonable request. Anticipate the response. You must be prepared to reply. Prepare yourself.

# Tips



- Consider an introductory phrase that works for you. “So – here’s the thing.”
- Use phrases such as “I prefer . . .” “I want. . .” “That doesn’t work for me.”
- Use a tone of voice and body language that expresses confidence in your values.
- Avoid moralizing language. It sounds attacking or blaming. A pattern of attack often gets a counterattacking or defensive response
- WIN

# Step four:



## Practice Assertive Responses

### – Select a Situation:

- Who is involved
- When (time and place)
- What bothers you about the situation
- How you normally tend to deal with it
- Fears you have about the consequences that would follow if you were to be assertive
- Goal, what you would like to do.

(Bourne, 2000)



# Techniques for Difficult Situations



- Broken record
- Fogging
- Shift content, focus on process/impact
- Defusing
- Summarization
- Specificity
- Integrity maintenance

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