

Assertiveness for Children

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Aims:

- to introduce children to cope with new ways of behaving which will give them strategies for coping with bullying
- to teach children to think differently about themselves by giving themselves praise and encouragement

Basic concepts:

Assertion theory is based on the premise that every individual possesses basic human rights:

- the right to be treated with respect
- the right to make mistakes and be responsible for them
- the right to refuse requests without having to feel guilty or selfish
- the right to ask for what you want (realising that the other person has the right to say 'no')
- the right to be listened to and to be taken seriously
- the right to say "I don't understand"
- the right to ask for information

There are three response styles:

passive, aggressive and assertive

A **passive response** is to behave as if other people's rights matter more than theirs.

An **aggressive response** is to behave as if your rights matter more than those of other people.

An **assertive response** is to respect themselves and others equally.

We may think that we have a basic personality type are "timid", "shy", "pushy" or "bossy". By using assertiveness skills we can work towards what we want rather than pushing others around or being a pushover. People will begin to respond to us differently too.

The thoughts we have about ourselves can help or hinder. Often we put ourselves down saying "no one will like me", "I am hopeless at this" etc. We can change this and say helpful things about ourselves instead, like "I have the right to ask for what I want", "I did OK", "It wasn't perfect but it was OK".

Making requests:

1. Be clear about what you want
2. Plan and practice
3. Make your request short ("That is mine. I want you to give it back")

Broken Record:

This can be used when making requests if people are trying to get round you, or if you are not being listened to, or for saying 'no'.

Broken record sounds like a record stuck in a groove: it goes on and on.

Decide what you want to say and stick to it: 'That is my pencil and I want it back' It is possible to respond kindly first before repeating the statement: "I am sorry you have no pencil but that is my pencil and I want it back". (A possible broken record response to being teased: "I am sorry, I didn't hear you")

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Saying No:

We have the right to say no.

Listen to your body and feelings: what do you really want to say? What do you really want to do?

If you are not sure, you can say "I don't know. I need more time or more information".

When you say 'no', say it early and if possible, first.

No excuses.

Keep your body assertive, don't smile and keep good eye contact.

Practice walking tall in front of a mirror,

Practice keeping eye contact with people.

Practice with your family or a friend

You can offer an alternative: "No, I don't want to play football. Let's go for a walk instead".

When we say no to someone, we are only refusing their request - we are not rejecting the person.

Fogging:

If we respond to the insult with more insults, it builds up. We do not need to do this: we can 'fog'.

Fogging swallows up insults like a great fog -bank swallows sights and sounds. When other people make hurtful remarks, we don't have to argue or become upset: we can turn ourselves into Fog and swallow up what they say.

If it's true then we respond "That's right"

If it's not true, we respond "You could be right" or "It's possible", or "You might be right".

Keep the answers short and bland. This may seem very strange at first, but fogging offers an alternative to distress or violence. (Think about what the bullies say to you and practice 'fogging')

Creative Response:

Not many of us are able to think up a clever remark at the right time. Try to think of a creative response when you are alone or with your family to help you.

You're looking for a response that will take the bully by surprise, or a statement that will give the bully no 'hook' to grab. Something funny might work.

Relaxation:

Practice relaxing: tense different muscles and then relax them. Lie on the floor, tense every muscle until you're rigid, slowly relax your muscles one by one, starting with your toes and working up to your head. Imagine being a melting candle, breathing in warm, golden light.

Ways of learning to be assertive:

Help children to learn assertiveness by giving them the chance to practice the new skills in a safe and supportive atmosphere.

You can play the 'what if?' game with them; you can do role-plays. Gradually these practice situations can become more difficult as the child grows more confident. Children who are bullied need lots of praise, lots of encouragement and lots of practice.

1. The child can pretend to be a detective; watch other people, look at eye contact, look at the way people stand, the way they walk, listen to their tone of voice, listen to what they say. Decide what is passive, what is aggressive, what is assertive. What can the child learn from their behaviour.
2. Talk about situations the child finds difficult. Teach them that they can't change what has happened in the past but they can learn from it. Could they have said or done something different? Would it have helped or would it have made things worse? Discuss what they could do if the same thing happened again. Discuss different ways of coping which are possible for the child and practice them in role plays.
3. Play the 'what if?' game: what if so and so came up to you in the playground and started calling you names? What if so and so tried to steal from you? Etc