

# **How to Be Assertive**

## **The Assertiveness Training eBook**

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## **About the Author**

David Bonham-Carter, the author of *How to Be Assertive – The Assertiveness Training eBook* is a life coach who provides specialist coaching support and advice for areas that involve negative or distorted thinking patterns, such as confidence & self esteem, assertiveness, anxiety, stress and specialist relationship issues such as jealousy.

David has a Masters Degree in social work from the University of Kent which he passed with distinction. Following this training he practised for many years as a social worker and probation officer helping people with mental health difficulties, homeless people, young people and others to make significant personal and practical changes in their lives and relationships before becoming a life coach and assisting individuals privately to deal with professional and personal problems.

David's work is based on methods which are acknowledged to be effective in helping to people to change behaviour that is problematic for themselves or others and he has received training in the following techniques and methods:

- CBT - Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (particularly helpful in dealing with negative and distorted thinking patterns)
- Motivational Interviewing (effective as a model for helping people to change or break difficult habits)
- Person centred therapeutic techniques, such as Gerard Egan's personal centred counselling model and Carl Rogers' person centred counselling model.
- Transactional Analysis
- Brief Therapy (also known as Solution Focused Therapy) - helpful in creating positive thinking strategies.

David writes a free email Newsletter of Life Coaching Tips which you can sign up for at [www.davidbonham-carter.com/lifecoachtips.html](http://www.davidbonham-carter.com/lifecoachtips.html).

# Index

## **Introduction: What is Assertiveness?**

Defining Assertiveness

Assertiveness – The Middle Way

The Three Types of Behaviour

Passive Behaviour

- Examples of Passive Behaviour
- Are there any Payoffs from Acting Passively?
- How Real are the Payoffs?

Aggressive Behaviour

- Examples of Aggressive Behaviour
- Are there any Payoffs from Acting Aggressively?
- How Real are the Payoffs?

Assertive Behaviour

- Examples of Assertive Behaviour
- Non Verbal Behaviour
- The Benefits of Being Assertive
- Assessing Your Own Tendencies to Passive, Aggressive or Assertive Behaviour

*Exercise 1: Understanding Your Own Behaviour*

*Exercise 2: Your Commitment to Acting Assertively*

## **5 APPROACHES FOR IMPROVING YOUR ASSERTIVENESS**

### **Approach No.1: The DEAL Method for Improving Assertiveness**

Introduction

Explaining the DEAL Method

1. Describe the Situation
2. Express your Feelings and Thoughts about it
3. Ask for Reasonable Changes that you Feel would Help
4. Listen and Negotiate a Reasonable Solution where Possible

Negotiation Tips

*Exercise 3: Using the DEAL Method for Assertiveness*

*Exercise 4: Preparing for a Discussion*

### **Approach No.2: Coping with Anxious Thoughts - The STAR Model**

Introduction

Using the STAR Model

Step 1: Describe a Problem Situation and the Anxieties it creates for you

Step 2: Set out Possible Alternatives

Step 3: Choosing Alternatives to Try Out

*Exercise 5: Create Your Own STAR Model*

### **Approach No 3: Owning Your Fears**

Introduction

1. Options
  - Relationship Example
2. Worst Case
3. Now

*Exercise 6: Owning Your Own Fears*

### **Approach No.4: Rights and Responsibility (R&R) Principles**

Introduction

What is involved in showing respect?

- The 4 R&R Principles
  - The Right to Express Your Feelings and Opinions
  - The Right to Say 'No'
  - The Right to Make Mistakes
  - The Responsibility for Making Decisions

Applying the 4 R&R Principles

*Exercise 7: Analysing a Past Situation*

*Exercise 8: Preparing for a Future Situation*

Troubleshooting the R&R Principles

*Exercise 9: My Positive Message*

*Exercise 10: Focusing on Outcomes*

### **Approach No.5: Try It and See (It's Not as Crazy as it Sounds)**

Introduction

What about the Fear of Failure?

Making Changes

Stages in Becoming Assertive

Using this Approach

- *Exercise 11: One Assertiveness Change*
- *Assertiveness Plan*
- *Successes Record*

### **Conclusion**

Combining Different Approaches

# **Introduction: What is Assertiveness?**

## **Defining Assertiveness**

A person who is assertive might be described as someone who:

- Expresses their views clearly and articulately without being aggressive
- Stands up for their own and other people's rights in a reasonable and clear way
- Allows other people a reasonable opportunity to express their opinions without allowing them to dominate a conversation
- Has the courage to express their own feelings, even about difficult issues, in a way which is respectful and honest.

## **Assertiveness – The Middle Way**

From the above it can be seen that key elements of assertiveness are:

1. Clarity
2. Reasonableness
3. Honesty
4. Respect.

Assertiveness is *not* about forcing your views on others or dominating a conversation. Nor is it about allowing others to dominate you. The first of these two extremes would usually be regarded as *Aggressive* behaviour and the second would usually be regarded as *Passive*. These types of behaviour are described further below, along with Assertiveness, which may be seen as a sensible middle way between the two extremes.

## **The Three Types of Behaviour**

### **Introduction**

It is sometimes said that there are three basic ways in which you can interact with others, passively, aggressively or assertively:

### **A. Passive Behaviour**

Passive behaviour is a type of behaviour which is characteristic of someone seeking above all to avoid conflict. If this is a form of behaviour which you show then it is likely that whatever your own feelings you may allow others to make choices and decisions for you or to take advantage of your goodwill.

### **B. Aggressive Behaviour**

Aggressive behaviour is the opposite of passive behaviour. Someone who acts aggressively will express their own needs and wants freely but often without thought for the feelings of others and sometimes in a loud or intimidating manner.

### **C. Assertive Behaviour**

As can be seen from the definition of "Assertiveness" given earlier, assertive behaviour involves acting in a way which is neither passive nor aggressive but a happy medium between the two. If you can act assertively you will express your own needs, wants and feelings, but in a manner which is constructive and which allows others the opportunity to express their own.

## **Passive Behaviour**

### **Examples of Passive Behaviour**

If you have a tendency to act in a passive way then you may find that you find that you often do some of the following things:-

- Keep silent when someone is saying something you disagree with or don't like, instead of speaking up
- Say that you agree to something someone is saying even though you don't
- Agree to take on tasks or do things when asked even if you do not want to
- Volunteer to do things which will place a burden on you or take up your time because you feel you *ought*
- Apologise for something which is not your fault
- Avoid telling people the truth about your feelings, actions or plans for fear of upsetting them or creating conflict.

## **Are there any Payoffs from Acting Passively?**

There are a number of possible short term payoffs that you might get from acting passively instead of asserting yourself. These include:

- Avoiding confrontation and argument
- Gaining the approval or good opinion of others
- Feeling that you are acting selflessly or being helpful.

## **How Real are the Payoffs?**

One of the problems with the above payoffs is that they may sometimes be imagined rather than real.

For example, you may think or hope that you are gaining the good opinion of others by always doing what they ask and allowing yourself to be treated by a doormat, but actually others do not always like this. They might prefer it if you were honest with them or if you stood up to them a bit more or let them know what you were really thinking or feeling.

Whether or not this is so, may depend on the person or situation, but it is a question worth asking when you are tempted to act in a passive way – is it really likely to achieve the result that you want?

Another problem with the above payoffs is that they may be short term only. If there is an unresolved issue, it is unlikely to be resolved by avoiding it – you are just putting off the conflict and the conflict when it comes may be worse - for example, the other person might justifiably say to you '*Why did you not say so before?*' or words to that effect.

Another problem with the above payoffs, is that they don't meet your own needs – if you are continually doing what others ask and denying yourself what you want, your own unvoiced frustrations or resentments may boil up and ultimately end up coming out in a destructive way either by you adopting one of the aggressive forms of behaviour described below or, alternatively, by your own self esteem, physical or mental health suffering from your own needs not being met or from you exhausting yourself by continually running around at others' behest.

## **Aggressive Behaviour**

### **Examples of Aggressive Behaviour**

If you have a tendency to act in an aggressive way then you may find that you find that you often do some of the following things:-

- Shout or speak very loudly
- Tell people what they ought to do or must do



- Put people down or describe their behaviour as unacceptable
- Frequently find faults in others
- Try to restrict others from doing things that you do not want them to do by acting in manipulative or controlling ways or even by attempting to use physical force
- State your own opinion as if it is a fact which others cannot disagree with or have no right to disagree with.

### **Are there any Payoffs from Acting Aggressively?**

In the short time you may feel that by acting aggressively, you get what you want and you avoid confusion because people know what you want.

### **How Real are the Payoffs?**

It is true that *sometimes* in the immediate or short term you may get what you want from being aggressive – for example, if you are in a position of power in an organisation and people go along with what you want because of fear of the consequences for them if they do not do so. Alternatively, others may go along with what you want simply because they want to avoid confrontation.

*However*, you will not always get what you want even in the short term, by acting aggressively. Your aggression may in some cases antagonise people and they may react by deliberately being obstructive or not giving you what you want, so your aggression may be counterproductive.

Furthermore, some people may outwardly agree with what you are saying to avoid the immediate conflict but in practice not do what you are asking or use manipulative ways of avoiding doing it.

One of the problems with aggression is that it does not foster constructive dialogue and honest relationships, because people tend to react to it either by *outwardly* avoiding confrontation but *inwardly* doing their best to avoid being helpful to you or by reacting in an equally aggressive way towards you.

Other problems from acting aggressively may be that:

- People don't respect you (whether or not they tell you that)
- You feel bad about yourself
- Your blood pressure may go up if you are frequently stressed and angry with resultant health risks
- If you get into a situation where you do not have power, you may not have effective communication skills which will help you to make problems in situations or relationships.

## **Examples of Assertive Behaviour**

By contrast to the above, when you begin to act assertively, you may find yourself doing some of the positive, clear and honest things below:

- Using 'I' statements to express your own views or feelings, such as:
  - 'I would like it if...'
  - 'I prefer...'
  - 'I think...'
  - 'I feel...'
- Making it clear when you are stating an opinion or personal viewpoint, for example using phrases such as:
  - 'In my opinion...'
  - 'My personal view is that...'
  - 'My impression is that...'
- Asking about others' views of situations or their feelings in an open way which allows them to articulate their views if they want to, for example by using questions such as:
  - 'What do you think of... ?'
  - 'What are your views on... ?'
  - 'How do you feel about... ?'
  - 'What would you like... ?'

## **Non Verbal Behaviour**

Using some of the above forms of expressions is likely to go some way towards achieving the characteristics of assertiveness as being clear, reasonable, honest and respectful which I identified above. However it is important to realise that our behaviour and the impression it creates for others is not simply a matter of words.

In certain circumstances even if you use a form of words like those listed above, you may find that others interpret what you are doing as being patronising or interfering or as having some other negative aspect to it.

Sometimes this may be purely down to a problem that the other person has – they may fail to recognise or acknowledge that you are acting in a reasonable way because of their own issues or distorted thinking.

On other occasions there may be aspects of your *non verbal* behaviour which appear to be aggressive or passive, so if possible try to:

- Speak in a friendly warm tone without overdoing it by being condescending
- Use friendly but not overly aggressive gestures to illustrate your feelings – for example, by gesturing in an illustrative but not threatening way with your hands

- Look at others where appropriate but try not to invade their personal space by getting *too* close inappropriately (you need to use your own judgement or perhaps get feedback from them or others as to how they experience your posture, expressions or gestures)

### **The Benefits of Being Assertive**

There are many potential benefits to being assertive, including:

- Feeling better about yourself
- Feeling more confident
- Being able to relax more
- Having greater awareness of your own needs and a greater ability to meet them
- Being able to create personal and professional goals instead of putting everyone or everything else first
- Participating in honest, constructive relationships where you and others can develop understanding and respect and solve problems together

### **Assessing Your Own Tendencies to Passive, Aggressive or Assertive Behaviour**

Most people are not just one thing. You may have a greater tendency to be passive than aggressive or vice versa and in both cases you may also have occasions or situations where you have been or can be assertive.

The aim of this book is to help you increase the number of occasions and situations in which you act assertively.

To begin, go through the two exercises that follow to reflect on examples of when you have shown each type of behaviour and to assess your commitment to becoming more assertive:

## **Exercise 1: Understanding Your Own Behaviour**

After reading through the introduction, answer the following questions as honestly as you can:

### **1. Passive Behaviour**

(a) Do you have a tendency to act passively at times? If so, give 1 example of a situation where you acted passively, saying what the situation was and how you acted, then answer questions (b) and (c)

(b) What perceived payoffs did you hope to get by acting passively?

(c) Were the payoffs real or just imagined? Please comment:

## **2. Aggressive Behaviour**

(a) Do you have a tendency to act aggressively at times? If so, give 1 example of a situation where you acted aggressively, saying what the situation was and how you acted, then answer questions (b) and (c).

(b) What perceived payoffs did you hope to get by acting aggressively?

(c) Were the payoffs real or just imagined? Please comment:

### **3. Assertive Behaviour**

(a) Think of just 1 occasion where you managed to act more assertively than you might usually have done. Describe the situation and what you did.

(b) What benefits did you get from acting assertively in the situation?

(c) What helped you to act assertively in this situation?

## Exercise 2: Your Commitment to Acting Assertively

1. How committed are you to acting more assertively? Circle your degree of commitment out of the options below:

*Not at all committed    Unsure    Quite committed    Very committed*

2. What is one thing that you can do which will help you to keep up your commitment to acting more assertively (or to increase it if it is not very high)? – Possibilities might include things like: writing down your commitment, putting it in your mobile phone or on your computer as a reminder, telling a friend, setting yourself an achievable target, e.g. to try acting assertively on 1 occasion in the next week. These are only suggestions, feel free to come up with your own idea!
3. *When* are you going to do the one thing that you identified in 2. above?

## **5 Approaches for Improving Your Assertiveness:**

The next 5 sections of this eBook set out 5 different methods or approaches to improving assertiveness.

The 5 approaches that are described are:

1. The DEAL Method for Improving Assertiveness
2. Coping with Anxious Thoughts – The STAR Model
3. Owning Your Fears
4. Rights and Responsibility (R & R) Principles
5. Try it and See (It's Not as Crazy as it sounds).

Some of the methods may be more appropriate for your situation and personality than others.

This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of methods to help you become more assertive but it introduces you to some different ideas. You may find you want to adopt one approach in particular or alternatively you may decide to combine different methods and approaches. That's fine. Do what you are comfortable with and which you find to be most effective for you. The ideas and approaches contained here are open to adaptation. They are intended as tools for you to try out and use.



# Approach No. 1

## The DEAL Method for Improving Assertiveness

### Introduction

The DEAL Method for improving assertiveness is an approach which is particularly helpful where your difficulty with assertiveness relates to voicing your own needs to others in relationships or getting your views heard.

Your difficulties might be for a number of reasons – for example, anxiety about upsetting others, or a feeling that it is too self centred to focus on yourself and that other people should come first.

Problems in articulating needs may come out either in that you rarely express them at all, or that when you do you do so in a self effacing way so that people seldom may not treat them seriously or may not even hear them.

Alternatively, it may be that anger and anxiety inside you bubble up and on occasion you express your needs in ways which others perceive as aggressive or demanding.

However, this particular approach, unlike some of the other methods in this eBook, *doesn't* involve you analysing the reasons behind your difficulties or looking at your thought processes. It simply gives you a structure and guidance to follow in dealing with the difficulties you have.

So to use this model effectively, you don't need to focus on the *why* of your assertiveness problems, just on following the method outlined in terms of *what* you are going to do.

This model taps into the four key elements of assertive behaviour which I mentioned in the Introduction, namely:

1. Clarity
2. Reasonableness
3. Honesty
4. Respect.

In particular the approach is about *reasonableness*. Remembering that it is reasonable for you to express your own wishes and needs in a polite but assertive way and then following the DEAL Method in doing that:

## Explaining the DEAL Method

The acronym DEAL stands for:

**D**escribe the situation or behaviour that is troubling you

**E**xpress your feelings and thoughts about it

**A**sk for reasonable changes that you feel would help

**L**isten & negotiate for a reasonable solution if possible.

It is perhaps simplest to take a particular example, to show how the method might work.

Imagine, for example, that you feel exhausted and resentful because you are doing all the childcare in your household and you would like your partner to help out, but you fear their reaction if you raise the matter.

You might approach the issue by going through the Headings 1-3 below (exploring the 'Describe, Express, Ask stages of 'DEAL') and preparing what you will say to your partner in advance. Where possible you would try to approach the issue with your partner at a time when you both have some space to talk about it rather than at a pressurised moment.

### 1. DESCRIBE The Situation

In describing the situation it usually helps to be specific and clear, giving an example of what you are finding to be a problem and trying to be accurate in what you say rather than using emotive or generalised language. Thus rather than say "*Why do you never help me with looking after the children?*" which may well receive a hostile reception, you might for example say:

*"I've been thinking about the arrangements for Saturday night and I've realised it may create some problems for me to look after the children then. I was hoping to go out with my friend X because it's her birthday and it won't be possible to if I have to stay at home with the children..."*

NB. Where possible try to use vocabulary and style of language which are comfortable and natural *for you* – so adapt any of the examples given here to your own style whilst keeping faithful to the underlying principles of:

- Being specific & not using generalisations
- Avoiding over emotive language
- Being polite, clear and accurate in what you say

## **2. EXPRESS Your Feelings and Thoughts about it**

Remember that although your feelings may be obvious to you, the person you are speaking to will not necessarily know what they are unless you tell them, so try as best you can to explain to them how the situation is making you feel. You might, for example, say:

*“I feel hurt that you haven’t offered to help out in this situation and that I am doing most of the child care which is leaving me tired. For example, last week it was me who put the children to bed every night.”*

Again, you will want to adapt the actual phrases used to fit your own style and vocabulary, whilst following the overriding principles:

- Usually it is best to avoid extreme or over emotional language
- Keep your statement simple and accurate
- Express your feelings and indicate what is the basis for them.
- Own the feelings as your own – i.e. you are acknowledging that this is how you feel, not suggesting that everyone would necessarily feel that way or that you are giving a universal truth.

## **3. ASK for Reasonable Changes that you Feel would Help**

The person you are talking to may not be able to read your mind, so if you know what you would like, it is helpful if you can be precise about it, e.g.

*“Would it be possible for you to look after the children on Saturday night so that I can go out? I can take care of them on Friday if you want to go out then. I wonder if we could also talk in advance about the options for sharing responsibilities next week and see if we can agree arrangements which give us both the opportunity to have some time for ourselves.”*

In asking for changes, it is again important to be clear and direct about what you are asking whilst trying to be polite and not overpersonalising the request with emotive critical descriptions of the other person.

If there are examples when the other person has done what you would like them to do, then one possibility is to start by focusing on these, e.g.

*“On Wednesday it really helped when you looked after the children for a couple of hours. If you can do a similar thing again I would appreciate it...”*

In the interests of reasonableness and balance, if appropriate make it clear that you are not saying the other person is all bad, by highlighting positives as well as being clear about what you would like them to do differently and why.

#### **4. LISTEN & Negotiate a Reasonable Solution where Possible**

Often the other person may have a different perspective on the situation. If you have not voiced your concerns before or have done so in an unassertive way, they may not even be aware of the concerns until you express them clearly.

Alternatively, it is possible that there are reasons or thoughts behind their behaviour and actions which have not occurred to you – for example, the partner in the hypothetical example situation discussed here may actually feel that there are a lot of tasks that they do, which you don't help out with.

Once you have expressed your thoughts and feelings and what you would like, it is therefore usually important to check out what the other person thinks. You might do this by a simple open question, such as simply:

*“What do you think?” or “What are your thoughts about it?”*

Once the other person has responded, if they are not fully in agreement with what you have suggested then you can try to explore with them whether an alternative solution is possible. This will involve considering:

- What is most important to you in this situation and what is most important to them – is it possible to meet both your priorities?
- What alternatives are possible – e.g. could you get a babysitter for the specific instance above and then agree future arrangements?
- In what ways are you both willing to compromise?
- If a compromise cannot be reached, then what are the implications for the relationship and what choices do you have for the future?
- If an agreement is reached, then confirm exactly what it is and clarify any grey areas – in a formal situation you may also want to make a written note of it and share that with the other person if appropriate.

## Negotiation Tips

Some people can get as far as expressing what they would like and then listening to the other person's view, but then find it difficult to actually get an agreement from the other person to make changes or act constructively.

Alternatively or additionally, you may find that having raised an issue for discussion or had it forced on you, you are tempted to back down or compromise too much for fear or the consequences of being assertive.

If this applies to you then it may well be sensible to give some thought as to how you are going to *negotiate* a solution or compromise which meets your needs to a reasonable extent, before you enter into a discussion where you are asking for changes or actions from someone else,

Below I therefore list 15 possible tips about preparing for effective negotiation, to help you get something out of the conversation or exchange of views that follows once you have expressed your needs and wishes to the other party.

### 15 Negotiation Tips – Preparing to get a Reasonable Deal

The tips below are designed to give you some pointers to how to prepare for effective negotiation. Some are likely to be more helpful for you than others, depending on the particular situation you are in and the difficulties you think you may experience. I suggest that you pick out the ones which are likely to be most relevant and useful for you personally and concentrate on them in your preparation:

1. Identify for yourself what things you are prepared to compromise on and what things you are not willing to compromise on because they are too important to you.
2. In the light of your knowledge of the behaviour and personality of the person you are going to be in discussion/negotiation with, give some thought in advance to what they might ask for and how you might respond.
3. Be prepared to listen to what the other person has to say but also think about how you are going to ensure that you get an opportunity to put your point of view and feelings across – in some cases it may be helpful at the outset of the discussion for you to suggest to the other person that you agree to allow each other a few minutes each in turn to express your views without interruption.
4. Prepare for how you may try to move discussion forward once you have both expressed your views – for example, this might involve you summarising the differences and similarities in each of your views and then trying with the other person to explore (or 'brainstorm') what different possible solutions there might be and what the advantages and disadvantages are of each for both of you.

5. In respect of those aspects where you might compromise, think of possible suggestions that you might make to the other party about what you would like in return from them if you compromise on those aspects.
6. In respect of those aspects where you are not willing to compromise, be clear in your own mind about what the consequences might be if the other person still refuses to meet those 'bottom-line' requests and what you will then do.
7. In most cases you will be hoping that a productive compromise can be reached. However, if your bottom-line requests are not met, then be prepared to act in the way you decided beforehand (under 6. above). If you are not prepared to carry through this commitment then you may decide that actually what you considered to be a 'non-negotiable' or 'bottom-line' request is actually just a strong preference. It is best to be clear about this in your own mind beforehand if possible.
8. In the light of your relationship with the other party and your knowledge of them, give some thought in advance to what style of approach is most likely to encourage the other party to respond positively to your request. Will it help for you to be encouraging and constructive and try to engage in a joint search for solutions? Or will it be more likely to be productive if you take a firm stance from the outset, indicating absolutely clearly what you want and what will be the consequences if your wishes are not met or at least are not met in full? The best style of approach may vary for different situations.
9. When, where and how do you want to approach the topic to give yourself the best chance of getting a friendly constructive or at least helpful response from the other party? In most cases if possible you may want to raise the subject at a time when both you and the other party can give full attention to the discussion without distractions and when you are not preoccupied with other matters or very tired or stressed.
10. Whilst you are looking for a good time to raise the topic, as indicated in 9. above, don't put off the moment for ever! The perfect time will probably never happen. If you find yourself delaying too much, then select a specific time or occasion to raise the matter and keep to your commitment.
11. Recognise that the person you are going to be talking to may say some things that you are not anticipating. If you are worried about committing yourself to something that you later regret, then prepare a stock response for the unexpected which will allow you time to think further before you make a decision – e.g. something as simple as: "I need to think about that before I give you my answer".
12. When you have considered all the above points, write down a summary of your conclusions and go through it before the meeting or discussion with the other party so that you are prepared.
13. At the meeting, if suggestions as to how to move forward are agreed, then go over them at the end to check that you are both clear about what they are and

clarify any possible points of doubt. If you think that what is agreed may be disputed later, then record the main points in writing and ask the other party to confirm that they are in agreement with your record.

14. If you can't resolve every issue, you may still agree to implement changes in respect of some issues and perhaps set a further date to talk further about any outstanding differences after you have both thought further about possible ideas for dealing with them.

15. If appropriate, decide how you both are going to keep track of whether the agreed actions have been implemented and what you would both regard as successful implementation – if appropriate set a provisional date for a further discussion to review progress and to discuss whether the agreement has worked or needs to be changed.

## **Exercise 3: Using the DEAL Method for Assertiveness**

Answer the questions below to use the DEAL Method to help you approach a situation where you want to voice your own needs or wishes better:

### **1. Describe the Situation**

*Follow the principles described earlier in this section of the eBook to describe the situation that is problematic for you. Keep your description short and clear as you can and express it in the first person (i.e. beginning 'I...'). If possible, this description should only be 1-2 sentences long – you are aiming to create a description that you can use in discussion with the other person or people concerned:*

### **2. Express Your Feelings and Thoughts about the Situation**

*Now follow the principles described earlier in this section to set out your own expression of how you feel about the issue. Again, if possible limit what you write to 1-2 sentences so that you can use it in discussion:*

### **3. Ask for Reasonable Changes that you Feel would Help**

*Now set out in 1-2 sentences the request that you would like to make or a possible proposal that you feel would improve the situation:*

**Once you have completed steps 1-3, you should have a few sentences which follow on from each other and which you can use when you meet with the person or people concerned to explain your needs or wishes and seek a practical solution. Check through the words you have written. Once you are happy with them, put the final touches on your preparation for the meeting when you aim to use them, by completing the next exercise.**



## **Exercise 4: Preparing for a Discussion**

Go through the following questions to prepare for the discussion when you are intending to express the points that you have decided on in the previous exercise:

1. When would be the best time for you to raise the issues and where?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What are the main points from the 15 Negotiation Tips in this section that you want to bear in mind when you raise the issues? Write them down here and read through them before you go into the discussion, to ensure that you are prepared:

3. Dealing with Potential Delays:

(a) What might get in the way of you going ahead with the discussion as intended?

(b) What 1 thing can you do reduce the likelihood of the problem(s) you identified in (a) happening?

(c) What 1 thing can you do to deal with the problem(s) identified in (a) if they do arise?

# Approach No 2

## Coping with Anxious Thoughts – The STAR Model

### Introduction

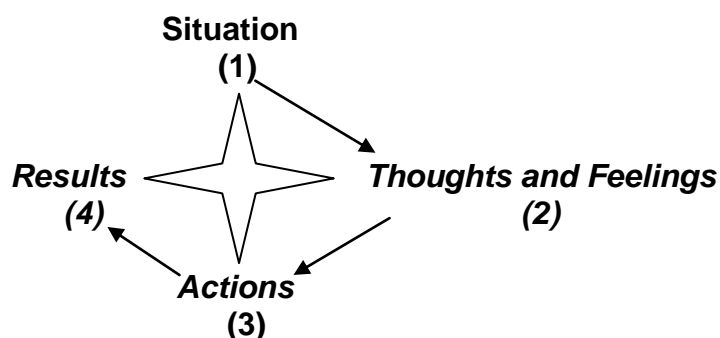
For many people one of the main stumbling blocks to expressing your views and feelings effectively and assertively is the anxious thoughts that go through your head about what you should or shouldn't do in the situation or what it might mean for you and your relationships if you act assertively.

The STAR Model is designed to help you deal with situations of this nature. It is based on the principles and ideas of cognitive behavioural therapy (otherwise known as CBT) - a collection of practical techniques and principles which have proved effective for many people who have a tendency to get anxious, by helping them to think in a more balanced way

The STAR Model analyses the aspects of a problematic situation into aspects of a four pointed star as listed below and then illustrated in a diagram.

- **S**ituation (What is the specific situation or type of situation which may create anxieties for you?)
- **T**houghts and Feelings (What thoughts go through your mind and what do you say to yourself in the situation?)
- **A**ctions (How do you typically act in the situation in response to it & in response to your thoughts and feelings?)
- **R**esults (What are usually the results for you of your actions in practical terms and in terms of how you feel afterwards?)

### THE STAR MODEL



## Using the STAR Model

### STEP 1: Describe a Problem Situation and the Anxieties it creates for you

The first step of the STAR Model asks you to describe a typical situation where you became anxious and did not act assertively or did not express your feelings or views. You can either describe an actual specific situation or just note down the kind of situation you are thinking of and your typical thoughts, feelings and responses.

The easiest way to show how you do this is to give an example. Here is one adapted from some quite common anxieties that I come across in people who seek help from me with becoming more assertive:

1. Situation	2. Thoughts and Feelings	3. Actions	4. Results
I am with friends and a difference of opinion arises or someone says something that I don't agree with.	<p><u>My Thoughts</u></p> <p><i>I mustn't create a conflict.</i></p> <p><i>Their opinions are more important than mine</i></p> <p><i>If I argue with them, they won't like me.</i></p> <p><u>My Feelings</u></p> <p>I feel:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Useless</li> <li>• Frustrated</li> <li>• Angry with myself and with them</li> </ul>	I keep my opinion to myself and stay quiet or if I'm asked directly I say that I agree with them even if I don't or else I try to change the subject.	<p><u>Practical Consequences</u></p> <p>We don't have an argument at the time but on another occasion after they hear me expressing different views, they confront me and criticise me for changing my mind. Trust is reduced in our relationship.</p> <p><u>My Thoughts &amp; Feelings about the Consequences</u></p> <p>I am annoyed with myself for not speaking out. I feel hopeless and incapable of acting in what I think would be an adult way.</p>

## **STEP 2: Set out Possible Alternatives**

Step 2 of the STAR Model involves setting out some possible alternatives for each of the four stages analysed in the STAR Model table. At this stage you are just trying to think of some *possible* alternatives, you do not have to decide to try any of them out yet (that comes in the next stage!).

Possible alternatives tend to fall into certain types depending on what stage you are focusing on:

### **Stage 1: Situation**

Here the alternatives are likely to be things that would help you to prepare for the situation or, to prevent it arising in such a problematic way – but be aware that if the alternative involves you avoiding the situation altogether - then you may decide in Step 3 that it is actually not really going to help the problem just put it off.

### **Stage 2: Thoughts and Feelings**

Here the alternatives are likely to be things that you can say to yourself when your anxious thoughts arise to put them into perspective and help you approach the situation in a more balanced way.

### **Stage 3: Actions**

Here you may come up with actions which involve a more assertive response *or* you may come up with techniques which help you to think and act more clearly, such as deliberately stopping to pause before you speak, or giving a holding response and then giving your more considered response once you have thought through what you really want to do or say.

### **Stage 4: Results**

If you get through the first 3 stages and things haven't worked out, then you may not be able to change the practical consequences, but you may be able to change the way that you think about them or the way that you think about yourself. So the options at this stage may involve things like deciding to learn from the experience and planning to do something differently next time *or* choosing not to be too hard on yourself, recognising you are human and then doing a different activity to take your mind off the situation rather than stress yourself even more about it.

On the next page I give an example of some of the possible alternatives that someone might come up with who had completed the STAR Model analysis example that I set out under Step 1 above:

### Possible Alternatives - Example

1. Situation	2. Thoughts and Feelings	3. Actions	4. Results
<u>Alternatives</u>  If I am going to go into a situation where I know a difference of opinion might arise, decide in advance how I plan to act.  Take my courage into my hands and don't avoid this kind of situation.	<u>Alternatives</u>  Remind myself that:  <i>My opinion is as valid as anyone else.</i>  <i>Genuine friends will respect me for expressing my opinion honestly and reasonably.</i>  <i>Some people may prefer me to express a view rather than stay quiet.</i>  <i>I have a right to express my opinion.</i>  <i>If I don't express my opinion I may end up frustrated and angry.</i>	<u>Alternatives</u>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pause and decide what to say before speaking.</li> <li>- Express my view honestly and accurately in a calm way.</li> <li>- Make a positive observation first and then indicate where I disagree.</li> <li>- Be aware of tension in my body and breathe slowly to help me relax.</li> </ul>	<u>Alternatives</u>  If the situation doesn't work out in the best way:  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Decide not to beat myself up about it.</li> <li>- Identify any things that I am happy with in the way I acted and give myself credit for them instead of just focusing on the negatives</li> <li>- Ask myself if there is anything I can do differently next time a similar situation occurs and decide to try that out.</li> </ul>

### Step 3: Choosing Alternatives to Try Out

In step 2, as just seen, you are asked to come up with some *possible* alternatives.

In step 3, you can evaluate the possible alternatives that you set out in Step 2 and make a conscious decision about which ones you are going to try out in a real life situation.

To do this, you may find it helpful to do one or more of the following:

- (a) Draw up a list of the Advantages and Disadvantages of each alternative you are thinking of trying out. If the Disadvantages outweigh the Advantages then either decide not to try out that particular alternative or else ask yourself if there is any way that you can reduce or deal with the potential disadvantages or increase the advantages of trying it out.
- (b) What words of encouragement would you give to a friend who was thinking of acting more assertively in this situation? Give those words of encouragement to yourself.

## Exercise 5: Create Your Own STAR Model

*After reading the description of how the STAR Model works and reflecting on the example given above, use the forms below to work through the 3 Steps of the STAR Model in relation to a situation of your own choosing where you have or might get anxious about expressing your views or feelings.*

### STEP 1: Describe a Problem Situation and the Anxieties it creates for you

1. Situation	2. Thoughts and Feelings	3. Actions	4. Results
	<u>My Thoughts</u>  I think:		<u>Practical Consequences</u>
	<u>My Feelings</u>  I feel:		<u>My Thoughts &amp; Feelings about the Consequences</u>



## Step 2: Possible Alternatives

1. Situation	2. Thoughts and Feelings	3. Actions	4. Results
<u>Alternatives</u>	<u>Alternatives</u>  Remind myself that:	<u>Alternatives</u>	<u>Alternatives</u>  If the situation doesn't work out in the best way:

### Step 3: Choose Which Alternatives to Try Out

- (a) Which of the alternatives you identified in Step 2 do you think you *might* try out? List them in the left hand column of the table below (if you are not sure then put them *all* down in the table below so that you can reflect on them). Use the table below to work out which of these *possible* alternatives you are *actually* going to try out - you can try out as many as you like.

Alternatives I might try out	Advantages	Disadvantages	Any ways of Reducing Disadvantages or increasing Advantages?	Do I intend to try it this alternative?

- (b) What words of encouragement would you give to a friend who was thinking of acting more assertively in this situation? Will it help if you say them to yourself? If yes, then do so!

# Approach No 3

## Owning Your Fears

### Introduction

Sometimes people fail to express themselves or to object or request a change in the way someone else is acting towards them, because of *fear* of the consequences. The STAR Model described previously in this eBook can help with this kind of situation, but there are also other specific techniques that you can follow to deal directly and logically with your fears or to cope with what is sometimes called *fortune telling* – imagining the worst is going to happen when the evidence that it will do so is not actually strong.

The approach in this section is for helping you to begin to identify your fears and see what choices you have to deal with them. The acronym “OWN” stands for:

**O**ptions  
**W**orst Case  
**N**ow

#### 1. Options

The first step in the exercise is to draw up a list of the options available to you and to highlight for each option, the Pros (Advantages) and Cons (Disadvantages) of trying out that option. Usually one of the options will be to continue behaving as you have been, or to do nothing. Start off by writing that down and identifying the advantages and disadvantages of that.

You might use the model for a work-related issue: for example, if your boss has given you some extra work which you don't feel you have time to do, but you are not sure if you should object because you are worried about the consequences.

You can also use this approach for personal relationship issues as in the example below:

#### Relationship Example

Imagine your relationship with one of your parents has always been difficult – for example, that your mother is often very critical of you.

Consider a situation in which you have just split up with your partner and when you tell your mother about it, her response is to suggest that your partner was the best thing that ever happened to you and she says: *how could you ruin that relationship like all the others*. Imagine that because you don't like confrontation and argument, you haven't said anything in response to this, even though you feel hurt by it and angry.

Draw up a list of actions available to you, starting with the option of doing nothing. List the pros and cons of each option, trying to be as objective as you can.

Your list might, for instance, look like this:

Options	Pros (Advantages)	Cons (Disadvantages)
<b><u>Option 1:</u> Do Nothing &amp; Continue in the Relationship as I have always done</b>	I have been in this situation before. I don't like it, but at least I am not taking unknown risks which I am worried might make things even worse.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I will continue to feel angry and upset inside</li> <li>- My mother's behaviour is unlikely to change if I do nothing</li> <li>- I may feel that I am pathetic because I have done nothing</li> </ul>
<b><u>Option 2:</u> Don't overtly challenge my mother but start to distance myself from her, having less contact</b>	By having less contact with my mother there would be less opportunity for her to put me down.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- My mother may react adversely, e.g. by criticising me for not contacting her</li> <li>- I may feel guilty</li> </ul>
<b><u>Option 3:</u> Raise the issue with my mother and explain to her how I would like her to act differently</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I would be showing that I can be a more proactive positive person</li> <li>- I would be expressing my feelings</li> <li>- My mother might understand me better</li> <li>- My mother might begin to change her behaviour</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- My mother might react even more angrily and be even more critical of me</li> <li>- I might feel that I had been unfair to her</li> </ul>
<b><u>Option 4:</u> Ask another family member – my father or sister/brother to raise the issue with my mother</b>	My mother might get a better idea of my feelings and might change her behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I would be relying on someone else to act on my behalf and would not have control over exactly what they said or whether they put the point across in the way I would like</li> <li>- I would only know about the conversation at third hand rather than being there and knowing what really happened</li> <li>- My mother might not change her behaviour</li> </ul>

## 2. Worst Case

Once you have drawn up your list of options and pros and cons, ask yourself which option you would choose if you were the kind of “assertive” person you want to be, bearing in mind that an assertive person is someone who:

- Expresses their views clearly and articulately without being aggressive
- Stands up for their own and other people’s rights in a reasonable and clear way
- Allows other people a reasonably opportunity to express their opinions without allowing them to dominate a conversation.

Let’s assume that in the current example you decide that an assertive person would choose Option 3, but you are wavering about it because of your fears about the possible consequences. Own up to your fear and ask yourself the following set of questions:

- (a) What is the worst that could happen if I act assertively?*
- (b) How likely as a percentage is it to happen?*
- (c) If it does happen will it still be worth me having acted assertively?*
- (d) What can I do to deal with it if it does happen?*

## 3. Now

Having set out the options available to you, their pros and cons and the worst case scenario if you act assertively, decide now on what you are going to do.

Weigh up the pros and cons of each option, the likelihood and downside of the worst case scenario and decide on balance which option you want to try.

Once you have decided which of your options you are going to try, ask yourself:

- i. *What will help to ensure that I carry out the action?* (e.g. setting a specific occasion or time to do it might help or carrying a list with you of the possible benefits of doing it, to refer to, or writing a preparatory script of what you might say if the option is going to involve you in speaking)
- ii. *Will it help me to get support from someone else* – e.g. by explaining what I am going to do to a trusted friend – or may this hinder me?

- iii. *Do I want to take the course of action all in one go, or do I want to try to break it down into steps or smaller actions in some way?*

Once you have made your decision then try out the chosen action(s).

If your choice is to do something differently from what you would usually do, then remember that what you are doing is trying something out. If it doesn't work as well as you hoped, then afterwards review whether to try it again or to try a different approach. If it does work well, then you may want to try a similar approach in other similar situations if they occur.

Either way, congratulate yourself for trying it out and give yourself permission to relax in some way once you have finished.

*You can use the forms on the next pages to own and address your own fears using this method:*

## Exercise 6: Owning Your Own Fears

**Briefly Describe what the Problem Situation is below:**

### 1. Options

*List possible options for how you might act in the table below, beginning with the option of continuing to behave or act as you have been or normally would do:*

Options	Pros (Advantages)	Cons (Disadvantages)



## **2. Worst Case**

*What option would I choose if I were assertive?*

*What is the worst that could happen if I act assertively?*

*How likely as a percentage is it to happen?*

*If it does happen will it still be worth me having acted assertively?*

*If it does happen, what can I do to deal with it?*

## **3. Now**

*Looking at the pros and cons of each option and the worst case scenario, which option to do I want to try?*

*What will ensure that I carry out the action?*

*Will it help me to get support from someone else (if so, what support and from whom)?*

*Do I want to take this course of action all in one go, or do I want to try to break it down into steps or smaller actions in some way (and if so how)?*

# Approach No 4

## Rights and Responsibility (R & R) Principles

### Introduction

The method outlined in this section for helping you to be more assertive is based on belief in a certain set of rights and responsibilities which can be relevant to assertiveness.

In the Introduction to the eBook I mentioned that 2 of the key elements of assertiveness are:

- Reasonableness
- Respect.

The R&R (Rights & Responsibility) principles are built around these elements.

It is important to realise that there are 2 aspects to showing respect, which are relevant to what your rights and responsibilities are. These 2 aspects are:

1. Showing respect to yourself.
2. Showing respect to others.

If you act in an overly *aggressive* way then it is likely that you are not showing respect to others (You may also not be respecting yourself enough to believe that you can act reasonably).

If you act in an overly *passive* way then it is likely that you are not showing respect to yourself, by not recognising your own needs or not believing that you have rights (You may also not be showing respect to others, if your passivity involves you not telling the truth to others or not showing a reasonable level of trust).

### What is involved in showing respect?

#### The 4 'R & R' Principles

This method relies on accepting the following 4 principles below as being involved in showing respect to others and yourself.

The first 3 principles are expressed as rights. The 4<sup>th</sup> principle is expressed as a responsibility:

1. The Right to Express Your Feelings and Opinions
  - (a) You are entitled to express your feelings and opinions in a reasonable manner.
  - (b) Other people are entitled to express their feelings and opinions in a reasonable manner.
2. The Right to Say 'No'
  - (a) You are entitled to say 'No' sometimes if you are asked to do something you do not want to do.
  - (b) Other people are entitled to say 'No' sometimes if you ask them to do something they do not want to do.
3. The Right to Make Mistakes
  - (a) It's OK for you to make mistakes sometimes. No one is perfect.
  - (b) It's OK for other people to make mistakes sometimes. No one is perfect.
4. The Responsibility for Making Decisions
  - (a) You are responsible for making your own decisions – other people do not need to take responsibility for your life.
  - (b) Other people are responsible for making their own decisions – you do not need to take responsibility for their lives.

**Note:** In case you haven't realised – the (a) items in the above principles are likely to be the ones you want to start applying if you have a tendency to act too *passively*, whereas the (b) items are likely to be the ones you want to start applying if you tend to act too *aggressively*.

### **Applying the 4 'R & R' Principles**

Applying the 4 R & R principles to help you become more assertive requires you to use them as a benchmark to check whether you are acting assertively and adjusting your actions appropriately if you find that you are not following them.

Bear in mind that you need to exercise some judgement of reasonableness in applying the principles: for example, Right No. 1 says that you can express your feelings and opinions *in a reasonable manner* and you will have to make your own judgement about what is reasonable. If you are looking for a system which avoids *any* discretion or personal judgement then you may be looking a long time or else you will find the system is too inflexible and rigid. This system involves some broad principles but it is up to you to use your best judgement to apply them in a reasonable way.

On the next pages are some exercises you can try out to help you apply the R & R principles and see how much a part of your life they can become:

## **Exercise 7: Analysing a Past Situation**

Answer the questions below to analyse a past situation where you feel you did not act assertively, either because you were too aggressive or because you were too passive. Repeat the exercise again with another situation if you think it will be helpful:

1. Describe the situation – what happened and what did you do or not do in the situation?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What is it that you not happy with in the way you acted or didn't act in the situation?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Consider the 4 R & R (Rights and Responsibility) principles:
  - a. Right to Express Your Feelings and Opinions
  - b. Right to Say 'No'
  - c. Right to Make Mistakes
  - d. Responsibility for Making Decisions

Which one of the four principles seems most relevant to this situation?

4. If you accept the 4 R & R principles what will you do differently the next time a similar situation arrives?

## **Exercise 8: Preparing for a Future Situation**

Answer the questions below to prepare for a situation that you know is likely to happen or that is planned, where you are worried that you might not act assertively, either because you will probably be too aggressive or because you will probably be too passive. Repeat the exercise again with another situation if you think it will be helpful:

1. Describe the situation – what is likely to happen and what typically might you do or not do?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What is it that you are worried about in the way you may act in this situation?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Consider the 4 R & R (Rights and Responsibility) principles:
  - a. Right to Express Your Feelings and Opinions
  - b. Right to Say 'No'
  - c. Right to Make Mistakes
  - d. Responsibility for Making Decisions

Which one of the four principles seems most relevant to this situation?

4. If you accept the 4 R & R principles what will you try to do in this situation?

## Troubleshooting the R&R Principles

One of the problems that can arise with the R&R method for becoming more assertive is if you find it difficult to bring yourself to believe that some or all of the four R&R principles apply to you.

What can you do if for a long time, perhaps since childhood, you have come to believe that you don't have the right to express your feelings or that you should be perfect and shouldn't make mistakes? These may be longstanding beliefs that you have had instilled in you from important figures such as your parents or others close to you, from an early age.

There are 3 things that I would suggest to remember if this applies to you:

1. Learning to become more assertive is like learning a new language or new ways of acting or new habits. Be patient with yourself. Like learning any new skills, language or habit, this takes time and practice. Because the habit of not being assertive and the underlying beliefs that go with that habit have been with you for a long time, at first the process of retraining yourself into new more productive habits may seem unnatural or difficult or you may lapse into old habits at times. This is normal. The next section of the eBook gives some more information about the process of change and developing new habits which you are embarking on and which may be relevant to you here.
2. If you know that there is an explanation in your background or the way you were brought up which explains why you now find it difficult to be assertive – for example, messages you received or things you were told by parents or others when you were young about how you should act – then acknowledging that fact explicitly can help you to move forwards from it. It shows that your difficulties in being assertive are not down to an inherent problem, they are primarily created by messages or ideas you were given by others or by events. One way to improve your assertiveness is consciously to start countering those messages – that internal negative dialogue – with new more constructive messages. The *Positive Message* exercise that follows is one way of helping you to do that.
3. If you are continually thinking about what you *ought* to do or what is *right* for you to do in a situation, then this can exert considerable pressure on you and create stress. When you catch yourself doing this, one thing you can do is to focus instead on what *outcomes* you want to achieve from a situation. The *Focusing on Outcomes* exercise that follows is a simple way of encouraging you to do this.

If you think you might have difficulty applying the R&R method then try the exercises on the next 2 pages to help you.

## Exercise 9: My Positive Message

1. Are there any features in your personal background which you think might give an explanation of why you have difficulty in being assertive (these might be for example: expectations or pressures that your parents, siblings or teachers, placed on you when you were young or cultural or gender-based ideas about how you should or should not act from society or from people close to you)? Complete the sentence below giving a simple explanation for why you might have difficulty in acting assertively, referring to those features:

*I sometimes have difficulty in acting assertively because...*

2. Looking at what you have written above, what can you say to challenge the features in your background that you have highlighted and to argue that they do not have to be correct and that you can, with practice, overcome them and act more assertively? For example, if your answer to 1. was '*I sometimes have difficulty in acting assertively because when I was young I was taught that 'girls should be seen and not heard' by my mother*', you might challenge this by writing down: '*Women have as much right to express their views as men. My mother had her own opinions and I do not need to agree to them. It may take time but I am going to try to start expressing my view more and see what happens...*'

Create your own positive challenge to the explanation you gave in 1. Try to create a challenge which you personally will find motivating and encouraging (it need not be identical or even similar to the example I have given, what is important is that it is meaningful and positive for you):

**If your confidence starts to waiver, remind yourself of the Positive Message that you have stated in 2. above. Use it as a motivating force to help you try out more assertive actions when you can – if helpful read through the statement you have made in 2 every day or put it somewhere where you can refer to it when you want and use it to encourage yourself.**

## Exercise 10: Focusing on Outcomes

*Try this exercise when you are unsure about how to act in a particular situation or when you find yourself thinking that you should or ought to act in a certain way. Instead of focusing on your moral messages about what you should do, use the exercise to focus on what outcomes you want to achieve from the situation:*

1. Describe a situation where you are unsure about how to act or find yourself thinking that you *should* or *ought* to act in a certain way:
2. What outcomes do you want to achieve from the situation?
3. List some different options for how you might act in the situation and comment on how well they will contribute towards achieving the outcomes that you want:

	Option	How well will this option contribute to the outcomes that I want to achieve?
1.		
2.		
3.		



4. In the light of your consideration of options in the table, what option do you want to try out?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. On a scale of 0-10 (where 10 is certainty), how likely do you think it is that you will try out the option you have stated in 4?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. If your score for likelihood in 5. is less than 8, what can you do to bring it up by one or more points, i.e. what can you do to make it a little more likely that you will try out the proposed action? - For example, this might include enlisting support in some way or making a written reminder or promising yourself a simple reward if you do manage to try out the action:

# **Approach No 5**

## **Try It and See**

### **(It's Not as Crazy as it Sounds)**

#### **Introduction**

This final approach to becoming assertive may sound unmethodical but there is a certain amount of logic that runs with it.

The *Try It and See* approach to becoming more assertive involves:

1. Trying some more assertive actions out
2. Recognising which actions are productive and continuing them
3. Trying to learn from what doesn't work.

If you have had difficulties with being assertive for some time then if you don't try to do something *differently* it is unlikely that you will get better results unless your situation changes through extreme good fortune! So this approach encourages you to decide what you want to do differently and to try it out.

#### **What about the Fear of Failure?**

The fear that you might fail or that you cannot achieve change may inhibit you from becoming more assertive.

What is likely to help you most is if you actually start trying to act more assertively in particular situations and see some positive results flowing from your actions. This will create a number of benefits:

- You will probably feel better
- You will have a greater belief in your ability to be assertive
- You will start to be more in charge of your own destiny and have more chance of getting what you want out of life.

If you are worried that you won't succeed or that the step of becoming more assertive is too difficult, then:

1. Start off with small specific steps: Try to make changes or set actions to try out which are small, precise changes from what you are doing now – that way you are choosing to try something which:
  - a. Is more achievable than a major change
  - b. May have less of a risk attached to it if it doesn't bring the result you want

Some examples of actions involving small changes rather than large steps might be:

- Saying to your boss in your annual appraisal that you would like the opportunity to lead on one specific project, (as opposed to say deciding that you will try to take the initiative *whenever you can* at work)

- Saying to your partner that you would like to have 1 evening a week on your own/with friends (as opposed to deciding that whenever possible you will do your own thing).
2. Try to adopt a mental approach where you recognise that there may be some unexpected results and you are going to look on what you are doing as if it is an *experiment* to see what works best. You will aim to try some new actions, building on the ones that work and seeking to learn from any that don't work or that you don't manage to carry out. Rather than getting overly self critical or down, just because something hasn't quite turned out as you expected, instead try to accept that this is all part of the learning process.

## Making Changes

If you have read my self help programme, *Changing Your Life – A Practical Guide*, you may be familiar with a model for the way that people make changes put forward by the psychologists James Prochaska and Carlo DiClemente, known as the *Cycle of Change* also sometimes called the *Transtheoretical Model*).

The model suggests that when you make changes or break negative habits, the process may well not be a straightforward smooth process from deciding to change through to achieving and maintaining change. Instead your efforts to change may be punctuated by lapses.

This doesn't mean that you won't or can't achieve change. It just means that you may find that sometimes you take two steps forward and one step back or that change isn't always smooth.

If you can begin by recognising this and not placing too high expectations on yourself to achieve perfect change in a flawless way, then you may have a better chance of dealing with setbacks and achieving longer lasting success.

This applies as much to trying to become more assertive as to any other change from a pattern of behaviour or thinking which you have held for a long time.

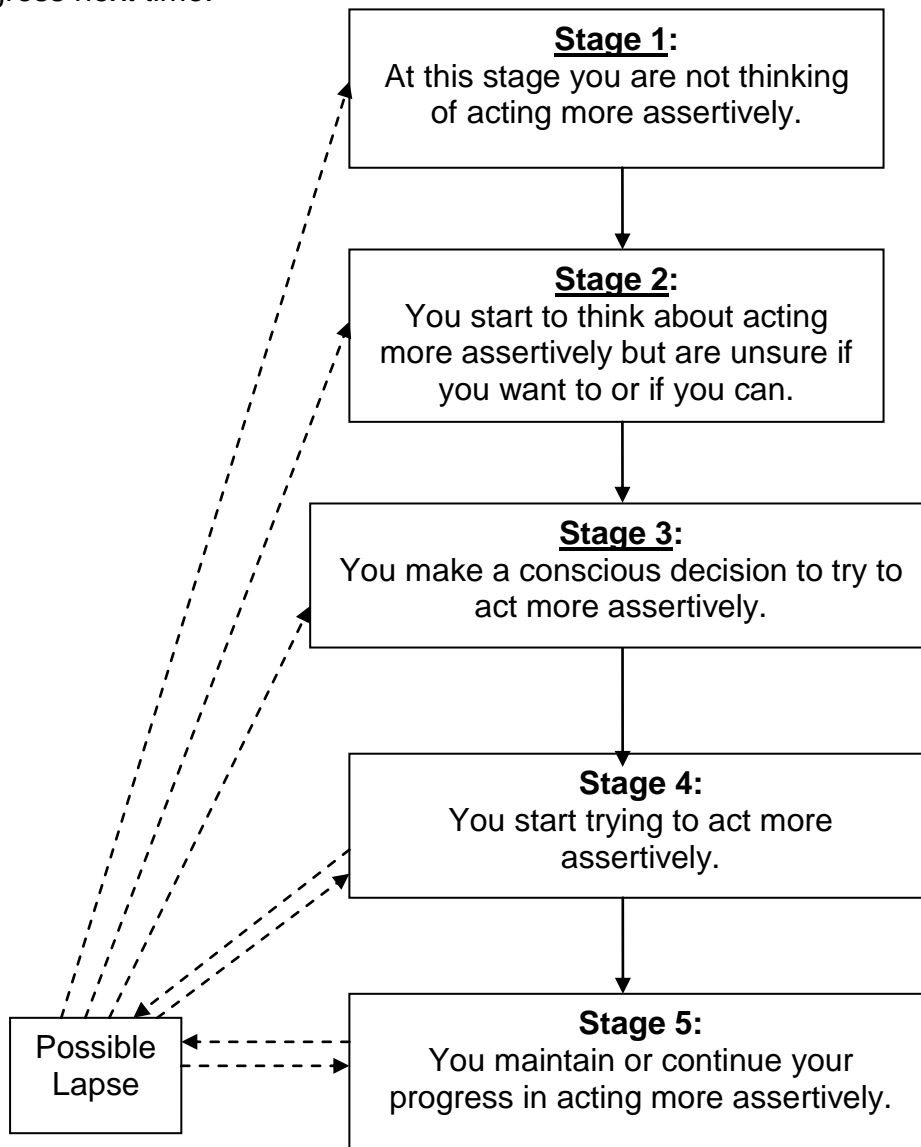
A flow chart representing the stages of change is given on the next page for information (including possible points at which you might 'lapse').

**The important point to remember is that it is normal to lapse – so if things don't go perfectly smoothly, don't beat yourself up about it, instead see if you can adopt the approach advocated in this section:**

- Try some new things out perhaps in small steps
- Recognise what works best for you and continue with that
- Try to learn from what doesn't work.

## Stages in Becoming Assertive

The flowchart below indicates the normal stages that people go through when progressing towards becoming and being more assertive. Remember, it is quite usual for a person to 'lapse' at different points in the process, so don't take it personally if it happens to you. It's not the end of the world, it's a normal part of making changes. If you have a lapse in any of the places indicated by the dotted arrows, recognise that this is part of the normal process of changing a habit. Then try to get back on track, using the 'lapse' as something to learn from and increase your chance of more progress next time.



This flowchart is an original creation of David Bonham-Carter. The theory behind it is inspired by J. Prochaska and C. Di Clemente's Cycle of Change and the principles of Motivational Interviewing espoused by W. Miller and S. Rollnick.

## Using this Approach

Using the 'Try it and See' approach and making use of the flowchart above, involves considering

:

- *What* you are going to try out
- *When* you are going to try it out
- *How* you are going to monitor your progress and keep your motivation

*This final part of the eBook gives, over the next few pages, some tools to help you work through these aspects of the 'Try It and See' approach. The Assertiveness Plan and the Successes Record can also be used in conjunction with any of the other methods in the book to record a plan for what you are going to do and to record your successes.*

## Exercise 11: One Assertiveness Change

1. Look through the *Stages in Becoming Assertive* flowchart. What stage do you think you are currently at in the flowchart (it is unlikely that you will be at Stage 1, because the fact that you are reading this eBook means you are at least already thinking about change!):
2. Give just *one specific behaviour or action* that you want to try out which will help you either to move forward in the flowchart towards the next stage or to avoid lapsing. The behaviour you choose might for example focus on just one of the four R&R principles set out in the last section. For example, you might decide to try out 'saying 'no' in one situation during the next week when you don't want to do something, or you might commit to expressing your opinion honestly in one situation:
3. In the table below list the benefits that trying out the behaviour or action identified in 2. could bring you and also list possible Drawbacks:

Benefits	Drawbacks

4. State one or more things that that you can do to help you to focus on the benefits or deal with the drawbacks.
5. State *when* and *where* you are going to try out the behaviour/action identified in 2:

*Repeat this exercise if you want to try out other actions, in respect of each proposed action.*

## **Assertiveness Plan**

Fill in the blanks to create your own plan for the actions you are going to try out in order to help you become more assertive:

**The Benefits that Becoming More Assertive May Bring are:**

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

**Specific New Actions or Behaviours that I aim to Try out in the Next Week are:**

- 
- 
- 
- 

**Things that I am going to do to help me focus on benefits of the actions or to help me deal with potential drawbacks are:**

**If I achieve one or more of the actions that I am aiming to then I will reward myself in the following way:**

## Successes Record

Once you have decided on one or more actions or new behaviours to try out, try to see what you are doing in trying them out as an experiment. Use the form below to evaluate the success of the experiment and also to help to encourage you to focus on positives in what you are doing, so as to keep up your motivation:

What was the situation & when was it?	Action or Assertive Behaviour tried out	What Positives came out of trying this Action/ Behaviour?	What Negatives were there?	Write a constructive comment about what you did or what you might do next time, highlighting any positives & learning from any negatives



## Conclusion

### Combining Different Approaches

This eBook has introduced you to 5 different approaches to improving your assertiveness. The approaches are complementary.

You may find that one or more of the approaches is best suited to your particular situation or difficulties or to your personality. If so, then focus your efforts on those approaches which are most helpful *for you*.

Alternatively you may find that a combination of the different approaches helps you best. If that is the case then you can try using several of the different exercises and ideas across the different approaches. They are designed to complement each other.

The 5<sup>th</sup> approach emphasises the idea of trying things out and seeing what works for you. I suggest that you adopt that general attitude towards your use of the ideas and strategies in this eBook, whichever of the approaches you favour for your personal situation:

- Select some of the ideas and strategies
- Try them out
- Try to learn and adapt from anything which doesn't quite work out for you
- Congratulate yourself on successes

Good luck and Best Wishes

*David*

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## A Final Word

I hope you have found the ideas in this book helpful and wish you the best of luck in trying out some of the ideas and learning to value and trust yourself.

If you have any feedback on this ebook you would like to share, please get in touch by sending an email to me at [davidbcarter1@gmail.com](mailto:davidbcarter1@gmail.com) (please note that feedback quotes may be included in publicity material for future issues of the book, but if so a pseudonym will be used to protect your identity).

You are welcome to visit my website for further ideas and information about coaching and self help products at: [www.davidbonham-carter.com](http://www.davidbonham-carter.com).

### **Other Practical Self Help Guides:**

Details of other practical guides I have written on issues such as:

- Building self esteem
- Making life changes
- Using cognitive behavioural techniques to deal with negative thoughts
- Dealing with anxiety and panic
- General life coaching exercises

can be found at the web page below:

[www.davidbonham-carter.com/books.html](http://www.davidbonham-carter.com/books.html)

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