

The Royal Liverpool and
Broadgreen University Hospitals



NHS Trust

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Patient Information

Assertiveness

Cardiology Directorate - Cardiac Rehabilitation

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What is assertiveness?

Assertiveness is an attitude and a way of relating to others, which is backed up by a set of skills for effective communication. In order to be truly assertive, a person needs to see themselves as being of worth and as having the right to enjoy life. At the same time assertiveness means valuing others equally, and respecting their right to an opinion whilst having equal respect for yourself. Assertiveness helps to avoid feelings of hurt, feelings of being used and feelings of being violated.

What are the effects of having limited assertiveness skills?

A lack of assertiveness can affect a person's quality of life significantly. It can cause problems with work, family, friends and relationships; its most common cause is ineffective communication.

How exactly can 'ineffective communication' affect a person's quality of life?

Ineffective communication can lead to feelings of regret, stress, anxiety and feelings of being undervalued. These feelings are mainly caused by people taking on too much and not communicating in an effective way through, for example, saying 'no'. This therefore can affect a person's ability to enjoy life as negative feelings and taking on too much can linger on the back of a person's mind. A lack of communication can therefore affect a person's confidence, motivation and self worth.

What skills do I need to be assertive?

To be assertive you need to be able to:

- be clear about how you feel, what you need and how it can be achieved
- be able to communicate calmly without being verbally or physically aggressive
- saying 'yes' when you want to but having the ability to say 'no'
- deciding on, and sticking to, clear boundaries
- being happy to defend your position, even if it provokes conflict with others
- being confident about handling conflict
- being able to give and receive positive and negative feedback
- having a positive, optimistic outlook.

How do I achieve these skills?

As with anything, practice makes perfect. When we are so used to saying 'yes' to people, it is difficult to change how we behave. Gradually start saying 'no' when appropriate and stick to your decision, don't feel bad about putting 'you' first. This may be difficult at first but saying no when necessary provides a sense of relief, relief that you don't have to do something you didn't want to. Tell people how you feel and why you don't want to do a particular task - be honest with them. Stick to your decision and don't go back on what you've decided as this can lead to feelings of regret as mentioned previously. Have the confidence to stand up to people in a fair way - everyone has the right to a voice so use it!

Conclusion

Although it can be daunting, the benefits of learning assertiveness are extremely rewarding. Assertiveness allows you to communicate better, command respect, and be listened to within respectful, negotiating relationships. In addition, having the confidence to say 'no' increases mood, motivation and quality of life.

Further Information

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The above information is available on request in alternative formats including other languages, easy read, large print, audio, Braille, Moon and electronically.