

**Assertiveness Group**

**Session 4: dealing with criticism, disappointment and compliments**

In today’s session, we explored assertive techniques on how to respond and give criticism. We discussed how we would all have experienced disappointment in our lives and explored assertive techniques for dealing with disappointment. We also looked at assertive ways of providing and responding to compliments. Finally, we had a brief re-cap of what we have covered over the last 4 weeks.

**Criticism**

Criticism is a form of analysis or observation from other people about our behaviour. We have all l been faced with criticism at some point, accepting criticism is an important part on our path to development and maturity.

There are two types of criticism:

* **Constructive criticism**- provides genuine feedback in a helpful non threatening manner which enable growth and development
* **Destructive criticism** – may not be valid or true and will often be presented in an unhelpful way. It can be embarrassing or unhelpful. It does not encourage growth and development.

**Exercise 4.1 How do you deal with criticism?**

Think about a situation where you felt criticised, how did you respond to this?

Make notes in the table below

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**Passive response –** we see criticism as a rejection of ourselves. May not want others to see we are hurt so criticise ourselves more – more likely to see the world as a critical place.

**Aggressive response** – see criticism as a rejection, therefore, we defend ourselves – more likely to lead to conflict and aggression.

* Both types of responses can affect our mental health and can lead to low self-esteem, anxiety and depression.

**Assertive response** –we are able to identify the difference between constructive and destructive criticism and we respond appropriately. We are able to see that the criticism is about our behaviour and not us as a person, therefore we are able to accept it without negative emotions.

**Responding to constructive criticism** **-** if the criticism is valid accept it and thank the person for appropriate feedback. Where appropriate use the following techniques:

* **Negative assertion** – by agreeing with somebody’s true criticism, you are accepting that you have faults and that you have the power to change them. E.G. If somebody makes a valid point by saying -“You are very messy and unorganised”. You could reply “yes this is true , I’m not very tidy”
* **Negative enquiry** – involves actively prompting more understanding of your behaviour and it allows you to see if it is truly constructive criticism. If it is not a true criticism then person will be put on the spot. e.g.if somebody states “you will find that difficult as you are shy”, you could ask “in what ways do you think I am shy”

**Responding to destructive criticism**

If the criticism is not true then you have the right to disagree with it. Negative enquiry is useful for dealing with destructive criticism as it allows you to ask for further clarity on the criticism. As stated above it will clarify if this is a true criticism or not. When most people are criticised they usually deal with it aggressively or passively, neither is good therefore using the following diffusion techniques helps you to respond to the criticism calmly.

1. **Diffusion: agree in part–** if one part of the criticism is true agree with that part. E.g you forgot to go to the shops and you never pay the bills, you are always letting us down, reply “ yes you are right I did forget to go to the shop
2. **Diffusion: Agree in probability** – this is helpful for when somebody says something that you think is highly unlikely to happen, but can agree that it may be possible e.g. If you don’t floss your teeth, you will get gum disease and all your teeth will fall out. Reply – Yes, i may get gum disease.
3. **Diffusion: Agree in principle** – allows you to acknowledge the persons logic without agreeing with what they say. E.g. that is a stupid way to go; you will be caught in traffic and be stuck for hours. Reply you are right if there is a lot of traffic, i may be stuck.

**Criticism and unhelpful thoughts**

As with most things, the way we respond to criticism will be influenced by our thoughts associated with being criticised. Therefore, it is helpful to identify any unhelpful thoughts and challenge them using the thought diaries. (E.G if I am criticised it means I am stupid) Also, ask yourself what can you learn from this criticism –remember constructive criticism is about growth and development and if somebody has hurt you, then you have the right to tell them.

**Dealing with disappointment**

Disappointment occurs when things do not go the way we want or expected them to.

**Exercise 4.2 How do you deal with Disappointment?**

Think about a situation where you felt disappointed, how did you respond to this?

Make notes in the table below

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**Passive response** – may give up easily and stop trying to do what it is that you were trying to achieve. You may become self-critical or sulk and feel sorry for yourself. If others have disappointed you, you may give up on them

**Aggressive response** – you may become angry at the situation or person that caused disappointment. You might become resentful and want revenge.

**Assertive response** – obviously you will still feel disappointed, however there will be no blame for yourself or others, therefore, you will not get stuck in a cycle of negative emotions. responding assertively allows you to take responsibility for your part in the disappointment and you will us the experience as a learning curve, to see how you can move forward.

**Disappointment and unhelpful thoughts**.

Again, it is important to try and challenge any unhelpful thoughts associated with disappointment.

**Compliments**

Accepting and giving compliments is an important social skill, as not only does it build relationships but is important for our self esteem and confidence. Despite this, some people find it difficult to accept compliments as it makes them feel too uncomfortable.

**Exercise 4.3 How do you respond to compliments?**

Think about a situation where you were complimented, how did you respond to this?

Make notes in the table below

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**Passive response** – we are likely to ignore, deflect or minimise the compliment. You may not even know how to respond

**Aggressive response** – you may become angry, annoyed defensive or even disagree with the compliment. You may even respond sarcastically.

\*Both responses can lead the other person to feeling awkward or to you feeing embarrassed

**Assertive response** – by accepting the compliment in a positive way, you are opening the possibility for you to experience new positive thoughts and interactions. That way when unhelpful thoughts creep into your mind, you will be able to choose and believe the compliments instead.

Assertive responses to compliments are healthy for relationship building, as it does not lead to the other person feeling awkward

**Tips for responding to compliments**

* Listen to what they are saying
* Smile- a compliment is meant to make you feel god
* Sit/stand up straight and maintain eye
* Don't interrupt
* Say thank you
* Accept the compliment without changing topic
* Use the compliment to further discussion.

**Providing compliments**

Giving compliments shows that you have noticed and appreciated something about the person or situation.

**Tips**

* Think about what you want to say
* Be specific – don't overdo it
* Mean what you say
* Be appropriate
* Use as a conversation starter

**Exercise 4.3 providing compliments**

Think about a time when you wanted to pay a compliment to somebody but did not. What would you like to have said to them?

Make notes in the table below

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**Final Tips for becoming Assertive**

1. Identify the situations that you wish to work on and rate them from easiest to hardest.
2. Identify any unhelpful thinking
3. Identify a new assertive way of thinking – use thought diary
4. Identify any unhelpful behaviours (verbal and non-verbal)
5. Come up with a more helpful behaviour
6. Rehearse what you are going to say
7. Do it
8. Reflect on what happened, what went well, what can be improved.
9. Keep practicing until you feel comfortable being assertive in that situation.

**Exercise 4.5 How Assertive are you?** (Available at the end of this booklet)

Back in session 1 we completed the “how assertive are you questionnaire.

* Pease re-rate yourself.
* Is there a change?
* Any areas you have identified which you wish to prioritise

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**Summary of weeks 1-4**

**Week1** – we learned what assertiveness is and how to recognises the different communication

styles (passive, aggressive, passve-aggresssive and assertiveness)**.** We explored our own communication styles and identified what situations we are more or less likely to act assertively. We also discussed “our assertive rights”

**Week 2** – we explored the barriers to acting assertively, where we discussed, learned behaviour, interpersonal reasons, low self-esteem, stress and anxiety, not knowing how to be assertive and unassertive thoughts and beliefs. We learned how to start managing our stress and anxiety through controlled breathing and PMR. We explored our unassertive thoughts and belief and learned to challenge them using thought diaries and behavioural experiments.

**Week 3** – involved exploring various techniques to help us become more assertive, where we discussed assertive verbal and non-verbal communication. We learned about the various types of assertion; basic, empathic, discrepancy, negative feelings and consequence. We explored requests and negotiation as well as learning how to say no.

**Week 4** – we looked at what is criticism, disappointment and compliments. Identified how we respond to all three by discussing the different communication styles as well as the unassertive thoughts and beliefs we may hold. Identified how to we can respond more assertively to all three. We recapped the tips for becoming more assertive and re-rated the how assertive are you questionnaire.

**Going Forward**

**Exercise 4.6: Going forward**

What are your assertiveness goals for the future?

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**Thank you for coming to the group**

**Good luck!**

**How Assertive Are You?**

Fill in each cell using a scale from 0-5. A rating of 0 means that you can assert yourself with no problem. A rating of 5 means that you cannot assert yourself at all in that situation

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|  | Friends of the same gender | Friends of different gender | Authority figure | Strangers | Work colleagues | Intimate relations or spouse | Shop assistant |
| Saying no |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Giving compliments |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Expressing your opinion |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Asking for help |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Expressing anger |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Expressing affection |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Stating your rights and needs |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Giving criticism |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Being criticised |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Starting and keeping a conversation going |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

(Source: Centre for Clinical Excellence)