

Some of the most common difficulties we experience in life can come as a result of poor communication or as a lack of asserting our needs to others. At Isorropia Foundation we have designed this leaflet to assist you in improving your communication and assertiveness skills.

## Part 1: The Communication process

Communication starts with an idea or thought in our minds. We then translate the idea into words and this becomes the message. The person we then communicate this to translates the message back into that idea or thought. Sometimes they are the same. Communication is a two way process built on a continuous cycle of giving and receiving feedback. When the receiver's thought is the same as the sender's thought, effective communication has taken place. The communication process has 3 parts to it and we use all 3 parts in most of our communication when we are able to see and hear the person with whom we are communicating.

### The three parts of the communication process are:

- ➡ Verbal
- ➡ Vocal
- ➡ Non verbal



### What do the terms verbal, vocal and non-verbal mean?

- Verbal:** Choice of words, vocabulary, slang, jargon, acronyms
- Vocal:** Accent, pronunciation, tone, volume, emphasis, speed, pitch
- Non-verbal:** Body language, facial expressions, hand movements, eye contact, personal distance



### Which of the 3 parts of communication is the most powerful?

- Verbal:** 7%
- Vocal:** 38%
- Non-verbal:** 55%      Albert Mehrabian

Less than 10% of what we say comes from our words. Therefore when verbal and non-verbal messages contradict each other, it is usually the non-verbal message that is received, vocal and non-verbal make up 93% of the communication process.

- ➡ To communicate more effectively, you need to become sensitive to non-verbal and vocal messages.
- ➡ You must also understand that it is impossible not to communicate; each of us is a transmitter that cannot be shut off.
- ➡ This explains why we sometimes jump to conclusions very quickly and believe our conclusions to be accurate.
- ➡ Non-verbal communication is 55% of the message. Remember to be careful about non-verbal content of the message you are sending.

## Part 2: Effective Listening

In our daily lives we all do a lot of listening, but often we do not get the choice of to whom we must listen. Studies have shown that we spend more time listening than we do in any other single waking activity, this amounts to about 45% of our daily time. As assertive people we must spend our time listening rather than just hearing.

### Effective listening

- Shows interest
- Makes the speaker feel validated
- Reduces irritation and conflict
- Shows respect

What are some skills that good listeners use to make you feel they are truly interested in what you are saying?

### A good listener

- Looks at you
- Doesn't interrupt
- Asks questions to keep on topic
- Encourages you to speak

## The 6 major skills in being an effective listener

1. Use attentive body language – lean forward, maintain eye contact, face the person squarely. Remember actions speak louder than words (55% of communication is non-verbal]. Observe the speaker's non-verbal clues and vocal tone to determine their emotion which in turn can aid solving a problem quickly.
2. Learn to use thinking time constructively – try not to be distracted by thinking your own personal thought. It is easy to think you are listening when actually you are making mental grocery or to-do lists. There is a physiological reason why our minds wander. Our brains are like an incredible computer they like to keep thinking while waiting for more information from the sender.
  - We speak at 125 – 140 words per minute
  - We listen to about 400 words per minute
  - We think at about 1000 words per minute.
3. Become an observer and control your mouth. – it is impossible to speak and listen at the same time.
4. Listen with an open mind and avoid prejudice - Avoid the tendency to resist ideas that are of personal use to you and try not to blank out ideas which you would rather not hear. For example, it is easy to be thinking of how you feel about a certain subject and rather than listening you are waiting for your turn to be the speaker.
5. Don't jump to conclusions – Avoid judging the speaker, finishing their sentences or interrupting them. We may jump to conclusions based on their emotional state such as stuttering because of nerves.
6. Let the speaker know that you hear and understand – give encouraging responses and let the speaker know that you really are listening. Summarise what you understand the sender has said.

### Listening is:

- Hard work that requires concentration
- A skill that can be developed
- An investment in yourself if practised

Sometimes we fail to appreciate the important role a listener plays. A listener often controls a conversation non verbally. By using eye contact, facial expressions and posture, a listener can encourage or terminate a speaker's conversation. To become more effective listeners we must learn to listen with more than our ears and tune into peoples non-verbal signals .



## **Part 3: Assertive communication**

Assertiveness communication is a useful communication tool.

- It is crucial to understand when and how to apply your assertiveness skills and to understand that it's not always appropriate. Remember, sudden use of assertiveness may be perceived as an act of aggression by others.
- There's also no guarantee of success, even when you use assertive communication styles appropriately.

## **What is assertive communication?**

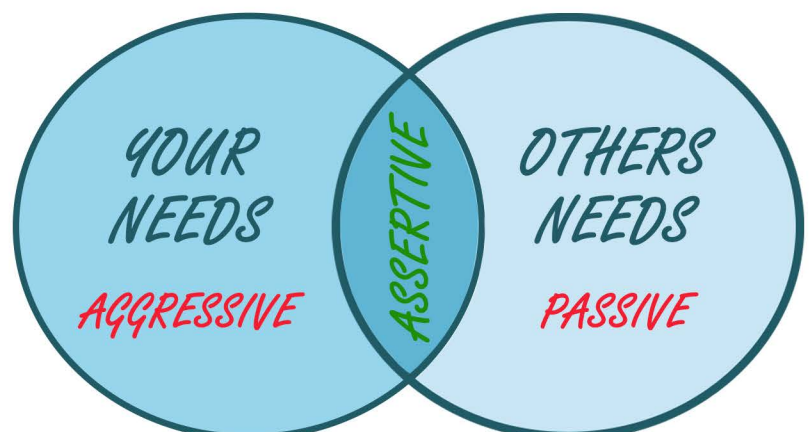
1. Assertive communication is the ability to express positive and negative ideas and feelings in an open, honest and direct way.
2. It recognises our rights whilst still respecting the rights of others.
3. It allows us to take responsibility for ourselves and our actions without judging or blaming other people.
4. It allows us to constructively confront and find a mutually satisfying solution where conflict exists.

## **Why use assertive communication?**

All of us use assertive behaviour at times... Quite often when we feel vulnerable or unsure of ourselves we may resort to submissive, manipulative or aggressive behaviour. Being trained in assertive communication actually increases the appropriate use of this sort of behaviour. It enables us to swap old behaviour patterns for a more positive approach to life. Changing your response to others can be exciting and stimulating.

## **The advantages of assertiveness skills in communication:**

- Assertiveness helps us feel good about ourselves and others
- Assertiveness leads to the development of mutual respect with others
- Assertiveness increases our self-esteem
- Assertiveness helps us achieve our goals
- Assertiveness minimises hurting and alienating other people
- Assertiveness reduces anxiety
- Assertiveness protects us from being taken advantage of by others
- Assertiveness enables us to make decisions and free choices in life
- Assertiveness enables us to express, both verbally and non-verbally, a wide range of feelings and thoughts, both positive and negative



## Part 4: Assertive communication (continued)

### Four behavioural choices

There are four choices you can make about which style of communication you can employ.

These types are:

1. Direct aggression: bossy, arrogant, bulldozing, intolerant, opinionated, and overbearing
2. Indirect aggression: sarcastic, deceiving, ambiguous, insinuating, manipulative, and guilt-inducing
3. Submissive: wailing, moaning, helpless, passive, indecisive, and apologetic
4. Assertive: direct, honest, accepting, responsible, and spontaneous

### Characteristics of assertiveness in communication

There are six main characteristics of assertiveness skills in communication.

- Eye contact: demonstrates interest, shows sincerity
- Body posture: congruent body language will improve the significance of the message
- Gestures: appropriate gestures help to add emphasis
- Voice: a level, modulated tone is more convincing and acceptable, and is not intimidating
- Timing: use your judgement to maximise receptivity and impact
- Content: how, where and when you choose to comment is probably more important than WHAT you say

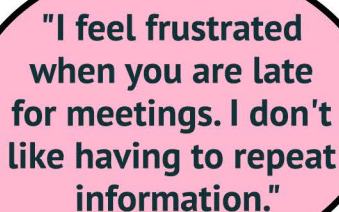
### The importance of "I" statements

Part of being assertive involves the ability to appropriately express your needs and feelings. You can accomplish this by using "I" statements. These indicate ownership, do not attribute blame, focuses on behaviour, identifies the effect of behaviour, is direct and honest, and contributes to the growth of your relationship with others.

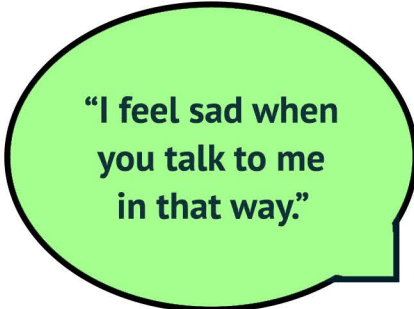
Strong "I" statements have three specific elements:

- Behaviour
- Feeling
- Tangible effect (consequence to you)

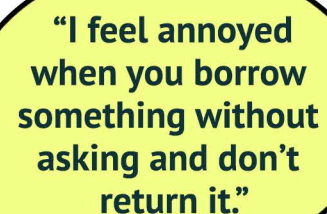
#### Examples:



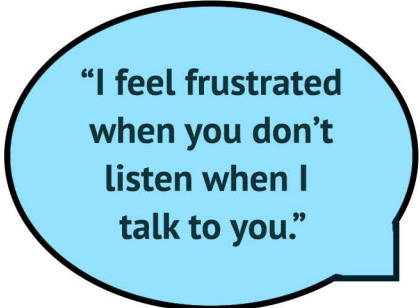
"I feel frustrated when you are late for meetings. I don't like having to repeat information."



"I feel sad when you talk to me in that way."



"I feel annoyed when you borrow something without asking and don't return it."



"I feel frustrated when you don't listen when I talk to you."



## Part 5: Six techniques for assertiveness in communication

### 1. Behaviour rehearsal

This is literally practising how you want to look and sound. It is a very useful technique when you first want to use "I" statements, as it helps dissipate any emotion associated with an experience and allows you to accurately identify the behaviour you wish to confront.

### 2. Repeated assertion (the 'broken record')

This assertiveness technique allows you to feel comfortable by ignoring manipulative verbal side traps, argumentative baiting and irrelevant logic while sticking to your point. To most effectively use this assertiveness technique use calm repetition, say what you want and stay focused on the issue.

**Examples:** "I would like to show you some of our products" **"No thank you, I'm not interested"** "I really have a great range to offer you" **"That may be true, but I'm not interested at the moment"** "Is there someone else here who would be interested?" **"I don't want any of these products"** "Ok, would you take this brochure and think about it?" **"Yes, I will take a brochure"** "Thank you" **"You're welcome."**

### 3. Fogging:

This technique allows you to receive criticism comfortably, without getting anxious or defensive, and without rewarding manipulative criticism. To do this you need to acknowledge the criticism, agree that there may be some truth to what they say, but remain the judge of your choice of action.

An example of this could be: "I agree that there are probably times when I don't give you answers to your questions."

### 4. Negative enquiry:

This assertiveness technique seeks out criticism about yourself in close relationships by prompting the expression of honest, negative feelings to improve communication. To use it effectively you need to listen for critical comments, clarify your understanding of those criticisms, use the information if it will be helpful or ignore the information if it is manipulative.

An example of this assertiveness technique would be: "So you think/believe that I am not interested?"

### 5. Negative assertion:

This assertiveness technique lets you look more comfortably at negatives in your own behaviour or personality without feeling defensive or anxious, this also reduces your critics' hostility. You should accept your errors or faults but not apologise. Instead, tentatively and sympathetically agree with hostile criticism of your negative qualities. An example would be: "Yes, you're right. I don't always listen closely to what you have to say."

### 6. Workable compromise:

When you feel that your self-respect is not in question, consider a workable compromise with the other person. You can always bargain for your material goals unless the compromise affects your personal feelings of self-respect. However, if the end goal involves a matter of your self-worth and self-respect, **THERE CAN BE NO COMPROMISE**. An example of this assertiveness technique would be: "I understand that you have a need to talk and I need to finish what I'm doing. So what about meeting in half an hour?"

## Conclusion

- Assertive behaviour is a useful communication tool.
- When you match psychology with effective communication styles you get a powerful combination.
- "Nothing on earth can stop the individual with the right mental attitude from achieving their goal; nothing on earth can help the individual with the wrong mental attitude" W.W. Ziege