

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS 101: PLANNING TO BE ASSERTIVE

Not all difficult conversations require assertiveness, but if there is a specific situation in which you know you will need to act assertively, this exercise will help you rehearse your approach.

Using this exercise:

1. Think of a forthcoming situation in which you need to act assertively. Before approaching the situation, consider the following questions and note down any thoughts and ideas.
2. As dialogue will be important, it is a good idea to think of what you are going to say and how you are going to say it. You should also practise this; there are tips below for doing this.
3. Following the situation, review your performance by asking the questions below.

Preparation questions

The following questions will enable you to consider how to handle situations assertively, while still taking into account the needs and rights of the other people involved. They allow you to develop contingency plans for different eventualities so you are less likely to be taken by surprise.

1. What are my objectives (i.e. the outcomes I would like to achieve)?
2. What is my point of view?
3. What are the main points I would like to cover?
4. What will my opening statement be?
5. What issues are likely to arise?
6. How am I going to handle these issues?
7. What are my needs and rights?
8. What are the needs and rights of the others involved?
9. What feelings are likely to arise?
10. How am I going to handle these feelings?
11. What dialogue/assertive statements could I use?

Practise

You can do this by:

- Role playing the situation with someone you trust
- Talking into a voice recorder and playing it back
- Practising in front of a mirror

Whatever your chosen method, practise your tone of voice, volume, intonation, body language and facial expressions. Aligning these with the message you are trying to give will help to reaffirm your point, and can help portray confidence.

Review

Following the situation, review your performance by looking back at your original notes and considering:

1. Did I achieve my objectives?
2. Did I state my point of view?
3. Did I stand up for my rights and needs?
4. Did I take into account the needs and rights of others?
5. Did I listen actively and respond appropriately?
6. Did I handle any issues assertively?
7. What did I say assertively, and what made it assertive?
8. What could I improve on?
9. What did I do well and would like to continue doing in the future?