

CWSH 13: Client handout Assertion

(The information under 'Other strategies for when assertion doesn't work' is adapted from Jarvis et al. (1995). *Treatment Approaches for Alcohol and Drug Dependence*. Chichester: John Wiley: ch. 7).

How to be assertive

- Make 'observer' comments (describe the behaviour, or the preferred behaviour) and explain how it makes you feel ('I' statements): 'When you yell at me I feel upset and hurt. I'd prefer it if you could find another way to let me know when I've upset you.'
- Acknowledge the other person's point of view: 'I can understand why you'd like me to stop smoking. However, I've just given up drinking, and giving up smoking at the moment would be too much for me. When you criticise me for smoking, I feel inadequate and hopeless, and would prefer that you left it for me to decide when is the right time to quit.'
- Role play assertive responses with other people before putting the responses into practice.

Other strategies for when assertion doesn't work

- **Broken record:** in the face of persistent demands, or when someone refuses to hear what you are saying, simply repeat yourself
- **Disarm anger:** when someone is so angry with you that reasoned discussion is impossible, say the person's name and make eye contact, say: 'I understand you are very angry, and I'd like to talk about things when you have calmed down, but not while you are this worked up'
- **Deal with requests by postponing answering:** don't give a definite answer. Instead say: 'Let me think about it and get back to you' or 'I'm not certain; let me know more about what it involves.' This gives you the chance to think
- **Selectively ignore requests or comments:** if someone keeps on about a particular issue, even when you've asked them to stop, simply ignore such comments, and only respond to other aspects of what they say
- **Fog:** fogging is useful when someone unfairly criticises you, but you don't want to engage in discussion, and would prefer to move on. You can 'turn off' the other person by making some vague comment, such as 'um um', 'perhaps', or 'you may be right'

CWSH 13: Client handout Assertion (continued)

- **Sort out what's reasonable and what's not:** sometimes when you start to become assertive, others are taken aback, and can feel rejected and become critical and attacking. Sort out what is reasonable on their part, and what is not. You may want to talk to a counsellor or perhaps a friend about this when it happens.