

Assertiveness without Rudeness

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Sadly, not all social interactions are as pleasant as we might think. Sometimes, we're 'forced' to deal with destructive criticism, stonewalling or even abusive language. In those instances it is crucial to know how to stand your ground, without being rude.

Those of us who struggle with social anxiety often find it difficult to face such unpleasant situations. Moreover, destructive criticism might even confirm some of our negative beliefs and dysfunctional thoughts. If you think you're incompetent, hearing the same thing from your teacher, boss or spouse will only make matters worse. Fighting back might be an alternative, but why not take 'the high road'? Why not learn how to respond in a 'civilized' manner, while defending your position at the same time. That's what assertiveness is all about. It's an attitude towards yourself and others, characterized by respect, integrity and honesty.

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Use First Person

This is the first and most important rule of assertive communication. By using the first person, you make it very clear that your statement is nothing more than a personal opinion. Each time you want to express your opinion, start by saying: 'I believe that...' or 'In my opinion...' People feel less offended knowing that what you say is just a personal belief, not a general rule. Every person is entitled to an opinion, but you have to be extremely careful not to enforce it as a universal truth or general rule.

Don't Beat Around the Bush

On many occasions, social anxiety impairs our ability to express ideas, opinions and emotions in a clear and concise manner. Socially anxious individuals tend to 'load' their speeches with unnecessary details. They 'beat around the bush' hoping that the other person won't feel offended by their personal beliefs.

Why Do Anxious People Stall?

This strategy is mainly the result of dysfunctional schemas like: If I tell the truth, other people will hate me or I must tell them what they want to hear. Sadly, this strategy is completely dysfunctional because: 1) even if you 'sugarcoat' the message, most people will grasp the main idea; 2) if 'sugarcoating' actually works, you'll mislead others into believing something very different from what you were trying to say. Either way, this strategy will eventually backfire.

Be Clear and Concise

An alternative solution is to be as clear and concise as possible. Keep in mind that it's virtually impossible to please everyone. At some point, you just have to hope that people will understand and appreciate your honesty.

Be Completely Honest, but in a Respectful Manner

They say that truth can sometimes hurt, but this doesn't mean that we should avoid it altogether. As long as you maintain a respectful tone and language, you won't sound offensive. The best way to do this is by making sure you use the right adjectives. Instead of saying, 'he's stupid', you can say 'he doesn't perform well'. It's all about criticizing the behavior, not the person.

Ask for Feedback

Being assertive is about speaking your mind and also making sure that you avoid any communication errors. One way to make sure that the other person clearly understood what you were trying to say is by asking for feedback. You can do this by asking additional questions like: 'How do you interpret this?' or 'What do you make of this?' If the other person rephrases your message without 'damaging' the main idea, it means that he or she understood what you were trying to say.

Avoid Too Much Sarcasm

People with social anxiety sometimes use sarcasm for the same reason that they use 'sugarcoating' - to avoid telling what they truly believe. Unlike 'sugarcoating', which leads to misinterpretations, sarcasm is a passive-aggressive communication style. Sarcasm can be acceptable, but only in certain contexts where people know that you're actually joking. Avoid

using sarcasm in a serious conversation because it creates a negative 'vibe'.

Each Statement Should Be Backed up by an Explanation/Reason

People are more understanding with you, if you offer a reason or explanation to why you think or behave in a certain way. Adding a foundation to your statement, makes it more robust. It shows people that you're the type of person that thinks before speaking. You want them to truly understand what you're trying to say.

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