

Healthy Communication

Assertive Communication Techniques:

Stating	When you do, When I see you, I feel
Checking	I am not quite sure how clearly I explained that, could you tell me what you think I said?
Insisting	Yes, I understand that you are busy. However, I need to speak to you urgently.
Compromise	I can see that you are very busy right now, can we arrange a time that is convenient for both of us?
Goal setting	Would you be satisfied if we
Goal inviting	What do you suggest that we do so that both of us are happy?
Reflecting	Do you feel when I? I can see that you are really angry.
Accepting	I can understand why you might think that, or how you came to that conclusion.
Inquiring	Were you upset by

(Source: Rees & Graham, 1991)

Body Language Signals

Passive	Assertive	Aggressive
Posture		
Slumped	Erect but relaxed	Erect, tense, rigid
Shoulders forward	Shoulders relaxed	Shoulders back
Shifting often	Comfortable posture, few shifts	Jerky shifts or planted in place
Chin down	Head straight or on a slight tilt	Chin thrust forward
Gestures		
Fluttering hands	Casual hand movements	Chopping or grabbing with hands
Twisting motions	Relaxed hands	Clenched hands
Shoulder shrugs	Hands open, palms out	Pointing
Frequent head nodding	Appropriate head nodding	Sweeping arms, sharp quick nods
Facial Expressions		
Lifted eyebrows, pleading look wide eyed, rapid blinking	Relaxed, thoughtful, caring or concerned look, few blinks	Furrowed brow, tight jaw, tense look, unblinking glare
Nervous or guilty smile	Genuine smile	Patronizing/sarcastic smile
Chewing lower lip	Relaxed mouth	Tight lips
Shows anger with averted eyes, blushing, guilty look	Shows anger with flashing eyes, serious look, slight flash of color	Disapproving scowl, very firm mouth/bare teeth, extreme flush.

Voice		
Quiet, soft, higher pitch	Resonant, firm, pleasant	Steely quiet or loud, harsh
Umms, ahhs and other hesitations	Smooth, even flowing, comfortable delivery	'Biting off' words, precise measured delivery
Nervous laughter	Laughter only with humor	Sarcastic laughter
Statements sound like questions with voice rising at the end	Voice tones stay even when making a statement	Statements sound like orders

(Source: Downing, 1995)

Skills of conflict resolution

There are a range of communication skills that a counselor can teach a client in the counseling process. Each is discussed below:

1. Win Win Approach

The Win/Win Approach is about changing the conflict from an adversarial attack and defense, to one of co-operation. It is a powerful shift in attitude that alters the whole course of communication (Conflict Resolution Network, 2006).

Encouraging your client to address each person's underlying needs means that they can build solutions that acknowledge and value everyone's needs, rather than denying or opposing them (axlerod, 1984).

Have your client ask questions like:

- "Why does that seem to be the best solution to you?"
- "What's your real need here?"
- "What interests need to be served in this situation?"
- "What values are important to you here?"
- "What's the outcome or result you want?"

The answers to these questions can significantly alter the agenda of the discussion. It allows for co-operative problem-solving, it can lead to opportunities for the client to take responsibility, be assertive and to say what they need to (Alexelrod, 1984).

In summary, the win/win approach involves strategies of:

- consideration of underlying needs
- recognition of individual differences
- openness to adapting one's position in the light of shared information and attitudes
- attacking the problem, not the people (Helpguide, 2006)

2. Withdrawal: If you physically or emotionally withdraw from a conflict, you no longer have a say in what happens. Withdrawal can allow a problem to grow out of proportion. It can be used to punish someone. It can leave the other person angry and helpless (Stress, 2005).

3. Suppression: This is often the 'peace at any cost approach'. Suppression can be positive if it gives a client time to think about how they will respond. However, suppressing a conflict means you don't discuss the main issues and communication is cut off (Conflict Resolution Network, 2006).

4. Win/Lose: This approach is often prompted by a need to protect oneself from being wrong. Win/lose is a power struggle where one person comes out on top. While it is sometimes necessary, it is rarely a long term answer (Healey, 1995).

5. Compromise: Compromise seems fair, everyone gains something, but no one gets everything they would like. This potentially leaves everyone feeling at least a little dissatisfied (Healey, 1995).

6. Creating empathy and the role of active listening: Creating empathy is about considering rapport and openness between two people. When it is absent, people are less likely to consider their needs and feelings. The best way to teach clients to build empathy is to help the other person feel that they are understood. That means being an active listener. There are specific listening activities relevant to different situations - information, affirmation or inflammation (Conflict Resolution Network, 2006).

7. Assertiveness: The essence of assertiveness is being able to state your case without arousing the defenses of the other person or denying their or your rights. The secret of effectiveness lies in saying how it is for you rather than what they should or shouldn't do. For example, "The way I see it..." attached to your assertive statement can help (Lloyd, 1998). When you want to state your point of view helpfully, the "I" statement formula can be useful. An "I" statement says how it is on my side, how I see it.

Clients could use "I" statements when they need to let the other person know that they are feeling strongly about the issue. Others often underestimate how hurt, angry or put out they are. So it's useful to say exactly what's going on for them - making the situation appear neither better nor worse (i.e. your "I" statement should be "clear").

(Conflict Resolution Network, 2006).

Difficult behavior (and the faulty belief behind it)	The downward spiral	Exploring and applying better alternatives
Seeking Attention ("I only belong when I am being noticed."),	You feel annoyed and react by coaxing. They stop briefly, and then resume behavior and demands, perhaps in a new way.	Avoid undue attention. Give attention for positive behavior especially when they are not making a bid for it. Support their contribution and involvement.
Power Plays ("I only belong when I am in control, when no-one can boss me!"),	You feel provoked or threatened and react by fighting or giving in. Their aggression is intensified or they comply defiantly.	Disengage from the struggle. Help them to use power constructively by enlisting co-operation. Support their self-worth and autonomy.
Seeking Revenge ("I am significant only if I make others feel hurt like I do.")	You feel hurt by them, and retaliate. They seek further revenge more strongly or with another weapon.	Convince them that you respect their needs. Build trusting relationships. Support their need for justice and fairness.

Appear Inadequate

("I won't be hurt any more, only if I can convince others not to expect much from me.")

You give up, overwhelmed. They respond passively, show no improvement, and stay "victim".

Encourage any positive attempt, no matter how small. Focus on assets. Provide bite-sized learning experiences they can succeed at. Support how they feel as a starting place for self-improvement.

Body Language Signals

Assertive

Posture

Erect but relaxed

Shoulders relaxed

Comfortable posture, few shifts

Head straight or on a slight tilt

Gestures

Casual hand movements

Relaxed hands

Hands open, palms out

Appropriate head nodding

Facial Expressions

Relaxed, thoughtful, caring or concerned look, few blinks

Genuine smile

Relaxed mouth

Shows anger with flashing eyes, serious look, slight flash of color

Voice

Resonant, firm, pleasant

Smooth, even flowing, comfortable delivery

Laughter only with humor

Voice tones stay even when making a statement