

Assertiveness Training Workshop

TI 007 - Thematic

By

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Assertiveness Training Workshop

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Introduction

Wanting to be responsibly and effectively assertive is perhaps one of the most universally recognized and desired needs that people have. In one respect our culture requires us to constantly give feedback, receive feedback, and initiate interaction with others. In short, this demands the ability to be appropriately assertive. However, in another respect our cultural patterns prescribe certain behaviors or ways of relating to others, which seem to conflict with the development of assertive skills. Since the need for a person to be able to be assertive is high and the chances for complete acquisition of the skill are rather low, it is not surprising that there has been overwhelming consumer response to participation in assertion training programs.

Goals

This assertiveness workshop is designed to:

1. Help participants acquire the skills basic to effective and responsible assertion.
2. Provide a positive group atmosphere in which participants will feel relatively comfortable in trying out new behavior.
3. Aid participants in developing some understanding of the internal value conflicts they experience when being assertive.

Group Design

The workshop is designed as an intensive assertive training experience and consists of five 2-hour sessions held weekly. The ideal number of group participants is 10 (plus co-facilitators) and should be composed of both sexes if possible. It is important that the co-facilitators are good assertive role models, and it is desirable to have both a male and a

female in the training roles. While it is not absolutely essential to conduct pre-group screening interviews, it is desirable to do so for the following reasons:

1. To develop a sense of commitment to the workshop.
2. To clarify expectations.
3. To explain group format and procedures.
4. To screen out individuals for whom the workshop is inappropriate.

Evaluation

The model of assertiveness training presented in this manual includes a pre- and post-test design. Currently there exist several useful self-report paper and pencil measures of assertiveness, such as the *Rathus Assertiveness Schedule* (Rathus, 1973), *Assertion Inventory* (Gambill & Rickey, 1975), *College Self-Expression Scale* (Galassi, et al, 1974), *Adult Self-Expression Scale* (Gay et al, 1975), and *Assertiveness Inventory* (Wolfe & Lazarus, 1966). Evaluation of the effectiveness of assertiveness workshops is not limited to the use of self-report devices. Another method of assessing the effectiveness of assertive training programs is to use an approach suggested by Eisler, et al (1973, 1975), which involves scoring and rating videotaped role plays prior to and after completion of assertion training.

Materials

Since the five sessions involve didactic input as well as experiential activities, a number of handout sheets are used. In addition, the facilitators actively suggest that each participant read at least one book dealing with the topic of assertiveness. To encourage the participants to become involved in reading and learning about assertive behavior, it is helpful to display or pass around copies of various books on assertiveness and to give a short overview of each.

The use of videotape equipment is recommended because it can be very helpful when teaching non-verbal assertion skills. Despite the recommended use of videotape, this model can be effectively taught without videotape equipment. When videotape is employed, it should not be used during the first two sessions since it tends temporarily to raise the anxiety level of the participants.

Session 1

Objectives:

1. To establish the assertion skills baseline for each participant.
2. To give information in order to reduce participants' anxiety about the workshop.
3. To begin to develop a sense of cohesiveness and a positive group atmosphere.
4. To develop a clear understanding of the differences between assertion, aggression and non-assertion.
5. To help participants become aware of the influence that value conflicts and other internal processes have on inhibiting assertive behavior.
6. To internalize responsibility for being assertive, aggressive or non-assertive.
7. To use the homework assignment as a means of establishing a contract with each participant.

Introduction:

1. Leaders provide a general overview of group format and procedures. They also reveal the extent to which role-playing, lecturettes, and homework assignments, etc., are employed.
2. Leaders administer pretest and explain rationale for its use.
3. Leaders respond to any questions participants raise about the group.

Ice Breaker Exercise:

1. Leader instructs each participant to pair up with someone else and describe the hopes and fears each has (1) about being in this workshop in particular and (2) about being assertive in general. Each participant is told that he or she will be responsible for describing to the group his or her partner's expressed hopes and fears.
2. After about 5 to 7 minutes, the leader selects a member of the first dyad and asks that person to share what was learned about the partner. Do this until each participant has had a turn.

Distribute Session 1 Outline

Leaders now distribute the Session 1 Outline. The outline summarizes key assertive principles to be discussed during the first session, defines assertiveness, and describes the homework assignments to be completed before Session 2.

Definition of Assertive Behavior by Leaders:

1. Present a clear, concise definition of assertive behavior.
2. Clarify and draw distinctions between assertive behavior and aggressiveness.
3. Explain the differences between non-assertive, aggressive, and assertive behavior.
4. Describe how being assertive requires being honest and involves respect for the other person.
5. Discuss each participant's reaction to the distinctions between non-assertive, aggressive, and assertive behavior.
6. Next the leader places a line on the chalkboard and places the word *non-assertive* at one end and *aggressive* at the other. The word *assertive* is then placed in the middle and the participants are asked to list adjectives that describe people who are non-assertive, assertive, or aggressive.

Non-Assertive _____ Assertive _____ Aggressive

Finally, one of the leaders asks each participant to go to the chalkboard and place an X on the line somewhere between non-assertive and aggressive, which would characterize how they view themselves.

7. Leaders role-play a specific encounter three different ways: assertive, aggressive, and non-assertive responses.

Leaders ask participants to observe all three role-plays and have them identify which one illustrated an aggressive, assertive or non-assertive response to the situation.

Developing Assertion Skills and Understanding Value Conflicts

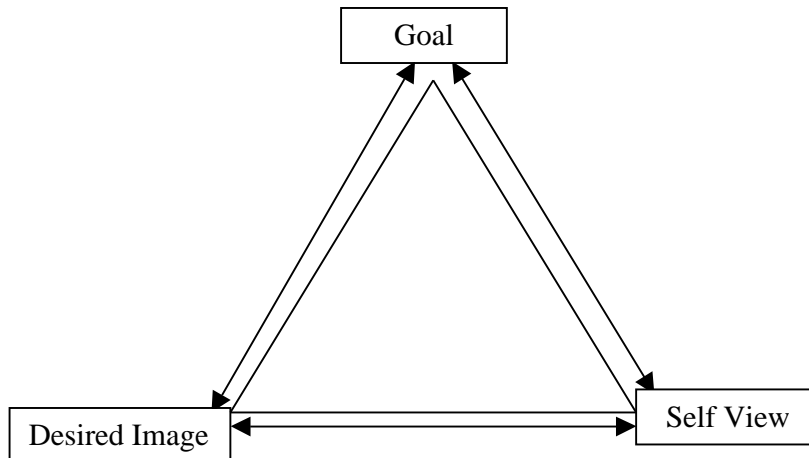
1. Leaders explain that becoming assertive involves both:

- a. The acquisition or strengthening of certain key skills.
- b. The clarification and resolution of personal beliefs and values that currently inhibit them from being assertive.

2. Leaders initiate discussion about how we are conditioned in many situations to believe that being non-assertive is a socially desirable behavior.

Clarifying Value Conflicts

1. Leaders present 10 principles of the Bill of Rights (Smith, 1975) as found in Appendix A, and describe the early childhood belief corresponding to each of the 10 principles.
2. Leaders encourage participants to react and respond to any principle(s) in the Bill of Rights with which they have reservations or disagree. Leaders should encourage discussion by using active listening techniques to clarify and amplify participants' reactions.
3. Illustrate the various conflicts that participants have revealed through their reactions to the Bill of Rights. Use the triangle conflict model to clarify value conflicts.



Leaders indicate how being assertive usually involves internal conflict between values of different strength. (*Example: A person might wish to return a defective appliance, but also wants to maintain an image with others as someone who never makes waves or complains.*)

4. Highlight how the internal conflicts (value clashes) that most people experience often prevent them from being assertive. Help participants learn to take responsibility for being assertive, aggressive or non-assertive.

5. Assertion is a right not an obligation. Whenever we are involved in a situation in which we could be assertive, we face a choice: assert, pull back, or be aggressive. We are not required to be assertive in any situation. How we behave is our choice. Since we choose a certain course of action, we are the only ones who should legitimately take responsibility for that choice. Our choices should not become others' responsibilities.

6. Explain and discuss *Rational-Emotive Therapy* concepts (see Appendix B) to indicate the inner, unheard dialogue that often occurs when we suddenly face a situation in which we might be assertive.

Specifically, illustrate “making something awful” (“awfulizing”), “catastrophizing,” and “what if” thoughts that people typically generate.

Termination of Session 1 and Homework Assignments

1. Present an overview of the key concepts discussed during Session 1.
2. Self-disclose your reasons for leading assertion training groups.
3. Ask each participant to complete the following homework assignments before Session 2:
 - a. Monitor yourself in various situations (work, class, social, and intimate relationships, etc.) and develop an awareness of how often you respond assertively or aggressively.
 - b. Identify which; if any, of the principles of the Bill of Assertive Rights you find difficult or impossible to implement.
 - c. Write up a contract that states the goals you wish to accomplish before the end of the final session of the workshop. State each goal as specifically as possible and where appropriate, give an example.

Session 2

Objectives:

1. To continue to build a sense of group cohesiveness and mutual trust.
2. To develop an awareness of the sequence of thoughts and actions involved in making an assertive response.
3. To help participants realize that assertive skills can be used to move closer to someone as well as to protect against or obtain objective goals.
4. To explain the key behavioral components of an assertive response.
5. To provide important attitudinal and cognitive guidelines for assertive responses.

Introduction:

1. Discussion of homework assignments and sharing of past week's experiences.
2. Collect each participant's contract and indicate that it will be returned next week.
3. Overview of the principles covered in Session 1 and distribution of the handout for Session 2.

Sequence of an Effective Assertive Response

1. Leaders describe the ideal chain of events, which, if followed, often leads to clear, honest, effective assertive behavior. (Note: concepts presented here are covered in the Overview.)
2. Assertive Response Sequence
 - a. The first step in the sequence is the "activating event," i.e. the situation or event that is causing the person to want to be assertive.
 - b. Before the person attempts to "blurt out" an assertive response, he or she should "look inside" (Step 2) to become aware of the feelings (anger, hostility,

fear, caring, sorrow, defensiveness, etc.) and thoughts (irrational thoughts, “what if’s,” imagined consequences, etc.) he or she is experiencing.

c. After an individual understands the thoughts and feelings that are cascading within, he or she should try to identify some personal goals (Step 3) for being assertive in that particular situation. The more clearly a person understands his or her goal(s) the better the person will be able to *act* instead of *react*.

d. If possible, the person should attempt to achieve only one goal at a time. Often people try to achieve several goals simultaneously in a single assertive response. For example, a person might have the goal of expressing anger and disappointment, as well as receiving money back for a defective piece of merchandise. Compound assertive responses are difficult to formulate and often deepen frustration and hostility; therefore, Step 4 in the sequence is to identify and state the most important goal. Once having achieved the goal, the person can then attempt to satisfy the other less central goals.

3. Practice the *Assertive Response Sequence*: The leader asks each participant to imagine a situation in which they would like to be more assertive and mentally project into the situation. Ask each participant to visualize the activating event, become aware of his or her thoughts and feelings, identify the key goal, and formulate a clear assertive response. Have each participant describe his or her assertive response sequence and discuss the process.

Categories of Assertive Responses Lecturette

1. Leaders present a lecturette describing the three categories or reasons for being assertive as developed by Printz (1975).

a. *Objective Approach Assertion* is assertive behavior utilized in the pursuit of a movement toward an objective goal (e.g., asking for a pay raise, asking to borrow an object from a friend, getting past rude secretaries or clerks to settle a matter, etc.).

b. *Subjective Approach Assertion* is assertive behavior utilized to approach another person for reasons of interpersonal attraction or any subjective communication to another person (e.g., getting beyond superficial acquaintances to actual friendships, communicating interpersonal feelings, etc.).

c. *Defensive Assertion* is assertive behavior used to maintain one's individual rights and personal dignity: In essence, one is “defending” one's life-space.

2. Leaders highlight the fact that a significant proportion of assertive responses are aimed at reducing interpersonal distance and increasing intimacy.
3. Leaders answer questions and discuss participants’ reactions to above categories.

Assertion Skills – Behavioral Components

1. Leaders explain and role-play examples of the non-verbal components of an assertive response.

a. *Eye contact* – Discuss the use of eye contact to engage another person.

b. *Body language* – Highlight the importance of effective body posture, use of gestures, and facial expression in communicating messages.

2. Have the participants form dyads and discuss any topic. Tell the participants that at the beginning they are not to make eye contact and are to restrict all body language cues. After about 2 minutes, ask them to slowly make eye contact and begin to bring their body into use in communicating their message.

Terminate the activity and discuss.

Assertion Skills – Attitudinal and Cognitive Guidelines

1. Leaders explain and role-play where appropriate examples of the following attitudinal and cognitive guidelines.

a. *Self-Inquire*: Stress the importance of looking inward to identify feelings and thoughts before being assertive.

b. *Use “I” Statements*: “I” statements minimize defensiveness and reduce the likelihood of escalating negative feelings. Contrast the positive outcomes usually associated with “I” statements with the negative, usually non-productive results generated by “you” statements.

c. *Be goal-directed*: It is critical to know the goal of being assertive in a particular situation so that an individual can focus clearly on goal relevant behaviors and not

be distracted by irrelevant information, attitudes, opinions, etc. Do not attempt to achieve multiple goals in a single assertive response if possible.

d. *Assert without long delays*: It is best for a person to assert as soon as he or she is aware of both desire and goal. The longer a person delays, the more likely she or he is to not assert or to allow intervening influences to weaken the intended message.

e. *Be persistent*: Stress the difference between being persistent and insisting on something. Many times it is necessary to restate and understand what is being communicated.

Practice in Identifying Behavioral, Attitudinal, and Cognitive Attributes

1. Leaders role-play a series of four short encounters that all demonstrate a deficiency in a specific assertive component or guideline. Ask the participants to identify and describe the problem and then suggest how it could have been improved.

2. Ask the participants to form dyads and devise a role-play situation to perform for the group. The role-play should illustrate a specific deficiency, and the group's task is to discover the error.

Termination of Session 2 and Assignment of Homework

1. Summarize principles covered during this session and discuss any questions or issues raised.

2. Make the following homework assignments:

a. Observe yourself in front of the mirror for 10 minutes. While observing, be sure to talk in order to provide a clear impression of how you appear to others.

b. In your interactions with others during the week, attempt at least one of the three kinds of assertive responses: (1) defensive assertion, (2) objective approach assertion, and (3) subjective approach assertion.

Session 3

Objectives:

1. To begin to increase the participants' level of assertive skills under low threat conditions.
2. To involve all group members in the process of learning to discriminate (feedback role) effective assertive response.
3. To have each group member become involved in communicating (role-play) an effective assertive response.
4. To utilize peer feedback as much as possible to energize skill acquisition.
5. To reinforce and encourage participants to keep trying to become more assertive.

Introduction:

1. Discussion of homework assignments, returning contracts, and sharing of past week's experiences.
2. Overview of the principles covered in Sessions 1 and 2 and distribution of handout for Session 3.

Developing Assertion Skills – General Information

1. Leaders indicate to participants that most of the remaining group time will be devoted to developing and refining assertion skills.
2. Describe the participants' roles and responsibilities in giving honest and clear feedback to each other. Give a short lecturette on how to give feedback.
3. Stress the need for feedback with regard to possible values conflicts, as well as non-verbal skills and attitudinal and cognitive difficulties revealed by the role-plays. Emphasize the importance of positive as well as negative feedback.

Assertion Skills Practice – Leader Contrived Situations

Note: The leaders will have to develop details for each of these situations before the session.

1. One of the leaders selects the first situation from the Practice Situations list on the handout for Session 3. Then the leader selects the person to his or her right and asks that person to role-play the situation selected.
2. Next the leader describes the situation more fully and indicates the goal to be achieved. He or she then instructs the participant to assert as effectively as possible, emphasizing the guidelines presented in the workshop during Session 2. The remaining participants are assigned the responsibility of giving feedback.
3. The leader then initiates the role-play in as realistic a manner as possible, being careful not to “stimulus flood” the participant who is attempting to assert. The role-play should be terminated after 2 to 3 minutes if the person has not been able to be assertive.
4. Feedback is encouraged first from the individual who role-played, then the other group members, and finally the leaders.
5. The sequence outlined below in steps 1, 2, 3, 4 above is repeated until all group members have had a chance to role-play one of the contrived, low threat situations.

Identification and Discussion of the Strength and Weaknesses Uncovered by the Role-Plays

1. During the role-plays, the leaders catalogue and conceptualize the basic difficulties encountered by most group members as they attempted to role-play.
2. Leaders should be sure to give feedback that helps identify values or role conflict as well as behavioral and attitudinal skillfulness.
3. Leaders comment on how effectively the participants utilized the attitudinal and cognitive assertion principles.
4. The leader’s goal is to give general feedback to the group, as opposed to specific feedback to individuals. Also, the leaders are trying to encourage participants and promote a “can do” attitude.

Homework Assignments

1. Instruct participants to try to be more assertive in situations they encounter during the week. Ask them to keep track of situations in which they attempted to be more assertive than before.
2. Ask participants to describe in writing two situations in which they have been unable to be assertive but would like to be. Have them specify their goals and the imagined consequences of being assertive in each situation.

Session 4

Objectives:

1. To increase the relevance of the role-play experiences by using real life problems.
2. To practice being assertive under higher level anxiety conditions.
3. To further skill development.
4. To continue to identify value and role conflicts that inhibit assertive behavior.
5. To utilize peer feedback as much as possible to energize skill acquisition.

Introduction:

1. Discussion of homework assignments and clarification of the two life situations in which each participant would like to become more assertive.
2. Sharing of the successes and failures encountered during the week as participants tried to be assertive.

Assertion Skills Practice Role Play – Personal Life Situations

1. The leaders ask the participants to think of one of the life situations in which they would like to be more assertive and then to be able to describe it in enough detail to allow realistic role-playing. Ideally, each participant should contribute a life situation example to this role play. The leaders ask the participant to identify his or her goal, label what he or she would feel like in the situation, and describe the probable behavior of the person being asserted to.
2. One of the leaders then takes the role of the person being asserted to and asks for two other group participants to each try to give an effective assertive response. Then the participant who originally stated the problem tries to make an assertive response. Each role-play should last no more than approximately three minutes.
3. The remaining members of the group are asked to give feedback to all three participants involved in the role-play. Again, feedback should center on unearthing

values and role conflicts, as well as the basic components of good assertive behavior. It may be useful to refer back to the “triangular conflict” model discussed in Session 1.

4. If some group members have not been participating in giving feedback to others, it may be necessary to assign specific feedback tasks. If this situation occurs, it would be possible for example, to assign some participants responsibility for giving feedback about non-verbal behavior, values conflicts, timing, good directedness, persistence, the Bill of Rights, etc.

5. After the final role-play, the leaders provide feedback about overall group progress and offer suggestions for the group when appropriate. Leaders might also offer concrete suggestions or describe techniques to individuals who seem to be unable to progress for one reason or another.

Homework Assignments

1. Before Session 5, each participant is asked to deal assertively with the life situation they role-played in the group during Session 4.
2. Each participant is given an individual assignment that focuses on helping that person overcome a specific problem the leaders have observed.

Session 5

Objectives:

1. To identify specific problems or difficulties individuals are expressing and practice skills that help overcome the barriers.
2. To solidify skill development and increase awareness of internal factors that may still be inhibiting individuals from asserting.
3. To give an overview of the progress of the group over the span of the workshop.
4. To evaluate individual growth, program accomplishment, and leader effectiveness.

Introduction:

1. Review and share experiences participants encountered during the week. Leaders should use active listening skills to tease out any special problems that could be worked on during the final session.
2. Each leader describes his or her viewpoint on the progress of the group.

Practicing Assertion Skills – Personal Life Situations

1. The same procedures as outlined in Session 4, ***Assertion Skills Practice Role Play – Personal Life Situations***, are followed, except that group members play the role of the person to whom the assertive response is being directed as well as play the asserter's role.
2. The leaders do not become involved in the role-plays except to give feedback.

General Group Discussion

1. The leaders facilitate a free-flowing discussion dealing with whatever assertion related issues participants wish to raise.
2. Leaders solicit feedback about the overall workshop effectiveness (Evaluation Form, Appendix D) and arrange for a follow-up session approximately one month later.

Evaluation: Post-test is administered.

Overview of Session 1

Definition of Terms:

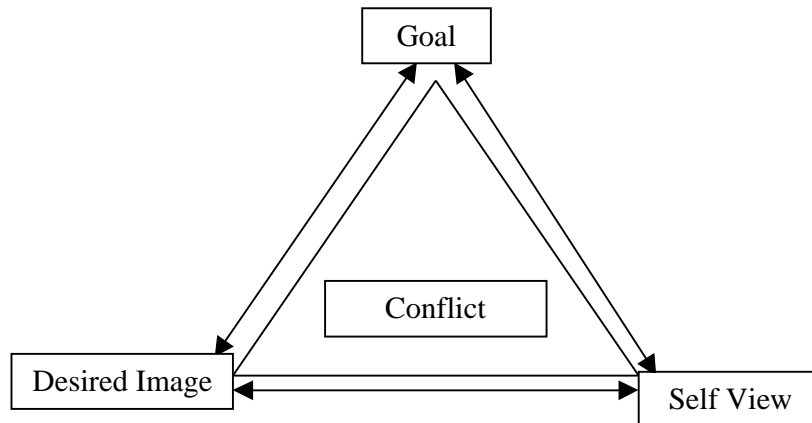
1. *Assertion:* Standing up for oneself in such a way that one does not violate the basic rights of another person. It's a direct, honest and appropriate expression of one's feelings and opinions.
2. *Aggression:* Standing up for oneself in such a way that the rights of the other person are violated in the process. It's an attempt to humiliate or put down the other person.
3. *Non-assertion:* Failing to stand up for oneself, or standing up for oneself in such an ineffectual manner that one's rights are easily violated.

From Jakubowski – Spector (1974)

Becoming Assertive Requires:

1. Developing or refining specific verbal and non-verbal skills.
2. Resolving or understanding the values and beliefs you hold which influence you to be either non-assertive or aggressive under certain conditions.

Conflict and Being Assertive



Homework Assignments

1. Monitor yourself in various situations (work, class, social and intimate relationships, etc.) and develop an awareness of how often you respond assertively, non-assertively or aggressively.
2. Identify which, if any, of the principles of the Bill of Assertive Rights (Appendix A) you find difficult or impossible to implement.
3. Write up a contract, which states the goals you wish to accomplish before the end of the final session of the workshop. State each goal as specifically as possible; where appropriate, give an example.

Overview of Session 2

Assertive Response Sequence (4 Steps)

1. Activating event.
2. Look inside to identify thoughts and feelings.
3. Identify goals in order to “act” instead of “react.”
4. Achieve one goal at a time.

Reasons for Being Assertive (Printz, 1975)

1. Objective approach assertion
2. Subjective approach assertion
3. Defensive assertion

Assertion Skills

1. Behavioral Components
 - eye contact
 - body language
2. Attitudinal and Cognitive Guidelines
 - self-inquire
 - "I" statements
 - goal-directedness
 - timing
 - persistence

Homework Assignments

1. Observe yourself in front of a mirror for 10 minutes. While observing, be sure to speak out loud in order to provide a clear impression of how you appear to others.
2. In your interactions with others, attempt at least one defensive approach, one objective approach, and one subjective approach assertion during the week.

Overview of Session 3

Practice Situations for Role Play

1. Person borrows newspaper.
2. Person takes seat you are saving.
3. Clerk demands reason you are returning item.
4. You are short-changed in the restaurant.
5. Person changes T.V. station in public lounge.
6. You receive wrong order in restaurant.
7. Someone cuts in line for a ticket or supermarket.
8. When checking into a hotel, you find a higher rate than promised.
9. When buying tires, you notice the mechanic putting the white walls on the inside.
10. Saying “no” to door-to-door salesman.
11. Giving a compliment to someone who is shy and doesn’t accept compliments well.

Homework Assignments

1. Be more assertive in dealing with situations you encounter during the week. Keep track of situations in which you attempted to be more assertive than before.
2. Describe in writing two situations in which you have been unable to be assertive but would like to be. Specify your goals and the imagined consequences of being assertive in each situation.

Appendix A: A Bill of Assertive Rights

1. You have the right to judge your own behavior, thoughts, emotions, and to take the responsibility for their initiation and their consequences upon yourself.
2. You have the right to offer no reasons or excuses justifying your behavior.
3. You have the right to judge if you are responsible for finding solutions to other people's problems.
4. You have the right to change your mind.
5. You have the right to make mistakes – and be responsible for them.
6. You have the right to say, "I don't know."
7. You have the right to be independent of the good will of others before coping with them.
8. You have the right to be illogical in making decisions.
9. You have the right to say, "I don't understand."
10. You have the right to say, "I don't care."
11. You have the right to express positive feelings towards others.
12. You have the right to be non-assertive in chosen situations and to feel good about yourself.

Adapted from Smith (1975)

Appendix B: Rational Self-Analysis

A. **Activating Event** (situation about which you became overly upset, anxious, depressed, etc.)

B. **Beliefs** (rational and *irrational* thoughts, ideas, and beliefs about this activating event)

C. **Consequences** (the emotions and actions resulting from your irrational beliefs)

D. **Disputing** (questioning or challenging you can use to change your irrational beliefs)

E. **Effect** (new coping statements and thoughts you obtained from disputing your irrational beliefs)

From Ellis (1973)

Appendix C: References

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Appendix D: Evaluation Form

Assertiveness Training Workshop

1. Rate how effective the workshop was in helping you to achieve the following goals by circling the appropriate number:

	<i>Not</i>				<i>Very Effective</i>
	<i>Effective</i>				
Increasing your awareness of assertiveness	1	2	3	4	5
Helping you learn to distinguish between assertiveness, aggressiveness and non-assertiveness	1	2	3	4	5
Identifying specific skills you needed to improve	1	2	3	4	5
Improving your ability to be effectively assertive	1	2	3	4	5
Other (specify) _____	1	2	3	4	5

2. Rate how helpful the following components of the workshop were to you:

	<i>Not</i>				<i>Very</i>
	<i>Helpful</i>				<i>Helpful</i>
Information about the basic components of assertive behavior	1	2	3	4	5
Discussion of homework assignments	1	2	3	4	5
Role-playing assertive situations	1	2	3	4	5
Other (specify) _____					
_____	1	2	3	4	5

3. How would you rate your overall experience in the program?

Not Negative *Very Positive*
1 2 3 4 5

4. How regularly did you do the homework assignments?

Not Regularly *Very Regularly*
1 2 3 4 5

5. Would you recommend the program to a friend?

No ____ Not Sure ____ Yes ____

6. How effective was (were) your group leader(s) in helping you to achieve the goals of the program?

Not Effective *Very Effective*
Leader 1 1 2 3 4 5
Leader 2 1 2 3 4 5

7. Rate how sensitive the group leader(s) was (were) to your concerns:

Not Sensitive *Very Sensitive*
Leader 1 1 2 3 4 5
Leader 2 1 2 3 4 5

8. How could the program have been improved to meet your needs more effectively?
