

# **ASSERTIVENESS GROUPS**

**Martha Davis**

*Focal Group Psychotherapy*

# **Assertiveness Groups**

**Martha Davis, Ph.D.**

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*Supervisor:* You idiot, there are so many bugs in this program that I should call an exterminator! I don't care if you have to stay here all weekend; get it fixed by Monday or you're fired. You're always missing your deadlines and you never do things right. You programmers are a bunch of worthless bums. It's because of lousy workers like you that America is losing its cutting edge on technology!

"The underlying message in an aggressive communication is: 'I'm superior and right and you're inferior and wrong.' The advantage of aggressive behavior is that people often give aggressors what they want just to get rid of them. The major disadvantages are that aggressiveness can cause others to retaliate in kind or get even in some devious way. Aggression tends to create uncooperative enemies with whom you'll have to deal in the future."

#### *Passive Communication*

"In passive communication, opinions, feelings, and wants are withheld altogether or expressed only partially or indirectly. The passive communicator tends to speak softly. Eye contact is often poor, and posture is frequently slouched yet tense, conveying a message of submission. I'll demonstrate a passive software programmer responding to an aggressive supervisor:

*Programmer: (under her breath)* I don't get paid enough to have to take this kind of abuse from this jerk! *(out loud, after a big sigh, with faint sarcasm)* I'll get on it right away, boss.

### **C. Skill: Learning To Distinguish Between the Three Modes of Communication**

Use this list (adapted from Davis, Eshelman & McKay, 1988) as a handout.

### ***Six Problematic Social Scenes***

#### ***Scene 1***

*A:* Looks like somebody's been driving by the Braille system. Isn't that a new dent I see in the car?

*B:* It's not my fault and I don't want to talk about it now!

*A:* No way are we going to let this go. You always try to weasel out of your responsibilities.

*B:* Get off my case!

*A:* I want to take care of this right now.

*B:* No way!

A's behavior is \_\_\_Assertive \_\_\_Aggressive \_\_\_Passive

#### ***Scene 2***

*A:* Why didn't you call me last night? You know that I was feeling lonely because your Dad is away on a business trip.

*B:* I was busy.

*A:* Too busy to call your own mother?

*B:* Sorry, Mom, I just forgot.

*A:* Well, I think that you are very thoughtless.

*B:* Thanks a bunch, Mom.

A's behavior is \_\_\_Assertive \_\_\_Aggressive \_\_\_Passive

### *Scene 3*

*A:* I know that this will be a big inconvenience to you, but would you mind changing the time of our appointment on Thursday?

*B:* No can do.

*A:* Well, I hate to bother you, but could you at least look at your calendar to see if there might be some other time you can squeeze me in?

*B:* Look, I'm busy...get back to me later.

*A:* All right. Sorry for the interruption.

A's behavior is \_\_\_Assertive \_\_\_Aggressive \_\_\_Passive

### *Scene 4*

*A:* Susan called and asked if we could babysit Friday night so that she can have a little time alone with her husband. I think that it would be fun.

*B:* Fun? After working all week? You know I'm always dog-tired by Friday night!

*A:* I'd really like to help Susan out. Friday night is your night to play couch potato, Saturday we have plans, so how about Sunday?

*B:* Much better...I'd enjoy that.

A's behavior is \_\_\_ Assertive \_\_\_ Aggressive \_\_\_ Passive

### Scene 5

*B:* Can I borrow your car tonight? I have to go to the library.

*A:* When?

*B:* Just from six until nine, when it closes.

*A:* That means you won't be back until nine-thirty.

*B:* So nine-thirty then...can I have it?

*A:* Will you put gas in it?

*B:* I can put a buck into it, if you like.

*A:* I don't think I can spare it tonight. I might need it to go out—the kids have bad colds. What if I had to take them to the hospital in an emergency?

*B:* Have Joe drive you—he's going to be here all evening.

*A:* Well, I guess you're right...Okay.

A's behavior is \_\_\_ Assertive \_\_\_ Aggressive \_\_\_ Passive

### Scene 6

(Over lunch, *A* tells her girlfriends that she is a pro-lifer, and they criticize her for not being willing to leave the choice about whether to have an abortion up to the individual woman.)

A: You certainly have a right to your opinions, but I happen to believe that the unborn child has a right to live, and it depresses me to think that a child's life is snuffed out because it's inconvenient to the mother. I'd like to see stronger legislation to protect the unborn child's rights and support motherhood.

A's behavior is Assertive Aggressive Passive

*Answers:*

Scene 1: A is aggressive. A uses sarcasm, rhetorical questions, you-messages, and absolutes. He does not take into account the feelings of B, who becomes immediately resentful and uncooperative in response to the accusations.

Scene 2: A is aggressive. The tone is accusing and blaming. B responds with reluctance and out of guilt.

Scene 3: A is passive. A's timid requests, preceded by apologies, make it easy for busy B to say "no."

Scene 4: A is assertive. The request is specific, non-hostile, open to negotiation, and successful.

Scene 5: A is passive. A can't say "no" directly and instead asks a series of questions, hoping to discourage B. Finally A makes a lame excuse that B easily counters.

Scene 6: A is assertive. She calmly stands up to the prevailing opinion of the group and achieves a clear, nonthreatening statement of her position.

**D. Skill: Defining Criteria for Measuring Change in Assertive Behavior**

Use the following example and the blank form as a handout.

*Assertiveness Problems and Goals*

Instructions: rate situations on a 1 to 5 scale in terms of their importance and of the difficulty in achieving assertive behavior.

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<i>Five Social Situations in Which I Have Difficulty Being Assertive</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Difficulty</i>	<i>Total</i>
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Examples:

to my boss when he asks me to do overtime, (passive)

2 x 3 = 6

*Goal:* I'd like to say "no" when I'm feeling burned out or have made plans for the night.

I never ask my co-workers for help, (passive)

1 x 3 = 3

*Goal:* I specifically want to ask for help

when it's the end of  
the day, I still have  
several customers to  
help, and I don't  
know the answer to  
a customer's  
question

I rarely tell my parents what I think of what they're  
doing when I know it will start a fight, since we see  
things so differently. (passive)

5 x                      5 =                      25

*Goal:* I want to tell  
my father that I  
think he has a  
drinking problem. I  
want to tell my  
mother that I  
disagree with her  
policy of cleaning up  
my father's messes  
when he gets drunk.

I get tongue-tied when I try to express my positive  
feelings to my wife, so I don't do it. (passive)

4 x                      5 =                      20

*Goal:* I want to tell  
her I love her and  
how much I  
appreciate her  
support.

I tend to blow up at my son when he behaves like a smart aleck and doesn't do his chores. (aggressive)

3 x 4 = 12

*Goal:* I would like to calmly restate what I want him to do and the consequences if he doesn't.

Total: 66

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Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### ***Assertiveness Problems and Goals***

*Instructions:* rate situations on a 1 to 5 scale in terms of their importance and of the difficulty in achieving assertive behavior.

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<i>Five Social Situations in Which I Have Difficulty Being Assertive</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Difficulty</i>	<i>Total</i>
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*Examples:*

1. *Problem:*

\_\_\_ x \_\_\_ =

*Goal:*

2. *Problem:*

\_\_\_ x \_\_\_ =

*Goal:*

3. *Problem:*

\_\_\_ x \_\_\_ =

*Goal:*

4. *Problem:*

\_\_\_ x \_\_\_ =

*Goal:*

5. *Problem:*

\_\_\_ x \_\_\_ =

*Goal:*

Total: \_\_\_

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### **E. Concept: Basic Premises Underlying the Three Modes of Communication**

"Assertive communication is based on the assumption that individuals are the best judge of their own thoughts, feelings, wants, and behavior. They are better informed than anyone else about their heredity, history, and current circumstances that shape them into unique human beings. Thus, the individual is best qualified to express his or her position on important issues. Since everyone is unique, there are many times when an individual will disagree with significant others. Rather than overpower the meek or give in to aggressors, individuals have the right to choose to express their position and try to negotiate their differences.

"Passive people tend to believe that their feelings, beliefs, and opinions

are not as important or valid as those of other people (Jakubowski-Spector, 1973, and Alberti & Emmons, 1970). As children, they learned to seek validation and guidance from their elders, and to doubt their own perception and judgment. As adults, they haven't reexamined the traditional assumptions of their childhood, and therefore they tend to give in to or are easily led by others. When they encounter a conflict between what they truly want to do and what someone else expects of them, they tend to feel guilty, wrong, anxious, stupid, or one-down; and they often end up deferring to the other person.

"People who often lapse into the aggressive mode of communication seem to have an inflated sense of their own importance and feel entitled to whatever they want without considering the rights or sensitivities of others. Often buried under this layer of self-importance is a damaged ego. As children, aggressive people were often abused by their elders, and later adopted the aggressive mode of communication in favor of passive victimization. Other aggressive people learned to believe from their early childhood experiences that they are superior and therefore entitled to dominate others. Prejudice learned in childhood can lead to subtle as well as blatant aggression in adults. People who are aggressive need to consider the rights and feelings of others as well as their own."

#### **F. Skill: Identifying Mistaken Traditional Assumptions and Countering Them With**

## Assertive Rights

Use this list (adapted from Davis, Eshelman & McKay, 1988) as a handout.

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### **Mistaken Traditional Assumptions**

1. It's selfish to put your needs before others'.
2. It's shameful to make mistakes.
3. If you can't convince someone that your feelings are reasonable, then they must be wrong.
4. You should respect the views of others, especially if they are in a position of authority. Keep your differences of opinion to yourself. Listen and learn.

### **Your Assertive Rights**

- You have the right to put yourself first sometimes.
- You have a right to make mistakes.
- You have a right to be the final judge of your feelings and accept them as legitimate.
- You have a right to express your own opinions and beliefs.

### **Mistaken Traditional Assumptions**

5. You should always try to be logical and consistent.
6. You should be flexible and adjust. Others have good reasons for their actions and it is impolite to question them.
7. You should never interrupt people. Asking questions reveals your stupidity.
8. Things could get even worse; don't rock the boat.
9. You shouldn't take up others' valuable time with your problems.
10. People don't want to hear that you feel bad, so keep it to yourself.
11. When someone takes the time to give you advice, you should take it seriously.

### **Your Assertive Rights**

- You have the right to change your mind.
- You have a right to question what you don't like and to protest unfair treatment or criticism.
- You have a right to interrupt to ask for clarification.
- You have a right to negotiate for change.
- You have a right to ask for help or emotional support.
- You have a right to feel and express pain.
- You have the right to ignore the advice of others.

12. Knowing that you have something special or have done something well is its own reward. People don't like showoffs. Success is secretly disliked and envied. Be modest when complimented.	You have a right to receive formal recognition for your special qualities and talents and for your work and achievements.
13. You should always try to accommodate others. If you don't, they won't be there when you need them.	You have a right to say "no."
14. Don't be antisocial. People will think that you don't like them if you say that you would rather be alone than with them.	You have a right to be alone, even if others request your company.
15. You should always have a good reason for what you feel or do.	You have a right not to justify yourself to others.
16. When someone is in trouble, you should give help.	You have the right not to take responsibility for somebody else's problem.
17. You should be sensitive to the needs and wishes of others, even when they are unable to tell you what they want.	You have a right not to have to anticipate the needs and wishes of others.
18. It's always a good policy to stay on people's good side.	You have a right not to worry about the goodwill of others.
19. It's not nice to put people off. If questioned, give an answer.	You have the right to choose not to respond to a question or situation.
20. You should be able to answer all questions about a field of knowledge with which you are familiar.	You have the right to say "I don't know" or "I don't understand."

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## **G. Skill: Broken Record Technique**

### *Introduction*

"The good news is that you have the assertive right to express what you think, feel, and want. The bad news is that most people in this world have not taken an assertiveness class, and many will try to ignore or distort your

efforts to stand up for your rights. The *broken record technique* is one of seven assertive skills that will help you deal more effectively with uncooperative and manipulative people.

"When a record is broken, it repeats the same piece of music over and over again. The key to the broken record technique is persistent repetition in the face of adversity. You will need to remember your legitimate rights if you are not to be manipulated into giving in to individuals whose interests conflict with your own. Occasionally you encounter people—encyclopedia salesperson, children, or a stubborn friend—who will not take "no" for an answer. When you want to set limits and someone else is having difficulty getting your message, you need to take a stand and stick to it.

"This approach is also effective in telling people what you want when their own wishes are preventing them from seeing yours. Examples include when you want your five-year-old to finish his dinner and he wants to watch TV; when you want to go home and your boss wants you to work overtime for the fifth night in a row; when you want to return a defective item and get your money back from a sales clerk.

"Here are the five steps of the broken record technique:

Decide exactly what you want or don't want. Review your thoughts about the situation, your feelings, and your rights.

Create a brief, specific, easy-to-understand statement about what you want. One sentence is best. Give no excuses or explanations. Do not say 'I can't.' The other person will point out to you that this is just another excuse and show you how you can. It's much simpler and more truthful to say 'I don't want to.' Eliminate any loopholes in your brief statement which the other person could use to further his or her position.

Use body language to support your statement: good posture, direct eye contact, and a calm, confident, and determined voice.

Firmly repeat your brief statement as many times as necessary for the person to get your message and to realize that you won't change your mind. He or she will probably invent a number of excuses or simply say 'no.' Eventually even the most aggressive person will run out of no's and excuses, if you are persistent. Change your brief statement only if the other person finds a serious loophole in it.

#### **H. Skill: Confronting Your Fears About Being Assertive**

"Many people hesitate to behave assertively because they fear that something bad will happen to them. Three typical fears include: fear of rejection, fear of failure, and fear of making a fool of oneself. Some fears are more realistic than others. For example, it is likely that if you give a talk to a large group, expressing your own opinions, one or more people will disagree with you or ask a question that you can't answer. It is highly unlikely that your audience will get up and walk out on you, thinking that you are an idiot.

If your fears tend to take on unrealistic, catastrophic proportions, it's essential that you reduce their negative power over you by replacing them with more realistic alternatives. Here are nine questions and hypothetical answers to guide you in examining your fears about being assertive and in deciding whether it is worth it to you to be assertive in a particular situation."

Use the following example as a handout and/or read it aloud.

### ***Confronting My Fears About Being Assertive***

1. If I am assertive in this situation with so-and-so, what is the worst thing that could happen?

(Example: If I ask Doug to the dance and he says "no," I will feel worthless.)

2. What beliefs do I have that would lend probability to this happening?

(Example: I'd have to believe that my worth hinges on Doug indicating his approval of me by accepting my invitation.)

3. Is there any evidence to support this belief?

(Example: Not really.)

4. What evidence is there to refute this belief?

(Example: I have value that is independent of Doug's

opinion of me. I value myself as a person; I have a lot of good qualities and I am a good friend, student, musician, and daughter.)

5. What would be a more realistic negative outcome of my being assertive in this situation?

(Example: Doug could say "no," in which case I would be disappointed.)

6. How might I respond to or cope with this negative outcome?

(Example: I would feel disappointed for a while. I would remind myself of my value as a person and that one rejection doesn't destroy my worth. I would talk to my best girlfriend about it, and then ask someone else to the dance.)

7. What is the best thing that could happen?

(Example: Doug would accept my invitation and we would have a great time.)

8. What is going to happen if I continue to do what I have been doing?

(Example: I will spend Friday night at home alone.)

9. Is it worth it to me to be assertive in this situation? [Weigh your responses to questions 5-8 before answering.]

(Example: It is worth risking the disappointment of Doug turning down my invitation on the chance that I won't have

to stay home Friday night but instead will have a date for the dance?)

Use the following form as a handout.

### ***Confronting My Fears About Being Assertive***

1. If I am assertive in this situation with so-and-so, what is the worst thing that could happen?
2. What beliefs do I have that would lend probability to this happening?
3. Is there any evidence to support this belief?
4. What evidence is there to refute this belief?
5. What would be a more realistic negative outcome of my being assertive in this situation?
6. How might I respond to or cope with this more realistic negative outcome?
7. What is the best thing that could happen?
8. What is going to happen if I continue to do what I have been doing?
9. Is it worth it to me to be assertive in this situation? [Weigh your responses to questions 5-8 before answering.]

## **I. Concept: Criticism as a Form of Manipulation**

"Many people have difficulty dealing with criticism because they experience it as personal rejection. As a child, you faced criticism from a one-down position. When you made a mistake, your elders passed judgment on you: 'Stevie, you shouldn't have broken your sister's toy. Bad boy.' You were wrong therefore you were bad. Eventually you learned to feel ashamed whenever you were criticized. This is a very powerful form of manipulation used to teach children to conform. Less damaging ways of instructing children in how to behave include: 1) reinforcing appropriate behavior and ignoring unwanted behavior, 2) pointing out what is wrong with the behavior and suggesting a more desirable alternative behavior, and 3) modeling appropriate behavior.

"You probably developed special strategies to minimize the pain of criticism that have followed you into adulthood, such as blowing up, recalling the sins of your critic, or pretending you didn't hear the criticism yet still feeling miserable inside. These aggressive and passive strategies for dealing with criticism can damage your relationships and your self-esteem. You are about to learn seven assertive strategies for dealing with criticism which will help you keep your relationships and self-esteem intact. These strategies include acknowledgment, clouding, probing, the content-to-process shift, time out, slowing down, and the broken record technique."

## **J. Skill: Acknowledgment**

"When someone offers constructive criticism, you can use this feedback to improve yourself. When you have made a mistake, having someone point it out to you can be helpful in preventing future errors.

"Whenever you receive criticism with which you agree, whether it is constructive or simply a reminder, acknowledge that the critic is right. Examples: 'Yes, I did manage to put on one navy and one black sock this morning. Thanks for pointing it out.' 'You're right, I *am* running 30 minutes late with my appointments today.' 'Thanks for letting me know that my voice is too soft for you to hear in the back of the room.'

"You do not need to give excuses or apologize for your behavior. When you were a child, you were asked such questions as 'Why did you spill the milk?' or 'Why were you ten minutes late?' You were expected to give reasonable answers, and you learned to manufacture reasonable excuses. As an adult, you can choose to give an explanation for your behavior, but you do not need to. Ask yourself if you really want to, or if you're just responding out of habit."

## **K. Skill: Clouding**

"Non-constructive, manipulative criticism with which you disagree

deserves the assertive technique known as clouding. The manipulative critic takes a grain of truth and elaborates on it, using his or her ample imagination to put you down. For example: 'Williams, late with that report? You're always late. I can't imagine how you keep your job with your inadequate work habits. Why, if everybody in this company were as slow and lazy as you are, we'd have to hang a hammock in every office!'

"Manipulative critics are expert at name-calling and *you*-messages. They bring up old history. They use absolutes such as *always*, *never*, and *everyone*. If you are foolish enough to try to reason with them, you only give them more ammunition for their case. They are not interested in listening to you, even when they ask you a question. Their fragile egos require them to be right and to always win their point. When you're tempted to justify yourself or retaliate in kind to manipulative criticism, remind yourself that you will only feed a senseless argument which you cannot possibly win. If you are still unconvinced, reflect back on times you have tried to reason or get even with a manipulative critic. Why continue to waste your time doing something so unpleasant and unproductive? As an alternative, learn how to stop manipulative critics in their tracks.

"I'm going to teach you three ways to diffuse manipulative criticism."

*Agree in Part*

"The first way involves finding some part of the manipulative critic's statement that you think is true, and agreeing with it. Rephrase the critic's sentence so that you can honestly concur. Drop the absolutes. Ignore the rest of the message. In response to the example just stated, you might simply reply, 'You're right, I am late with this report.'

"The critic will usually try to force you into admitting further wrongdoing. But if you continue to find some part of what the critic is saying to agree with, he will soon tire of trying to prove that he is right and you are wrong. After all, it is not much of a challenge to argue with someone who keeps agreeing with you."

#### *Agree in Probability*

"Now I'm going to teach you a second form of clouding which you can use with a manipulative critic. Find something in what the manipulative critic is saying with which you can probably agree. You can think to yourself that the odds of his being right are one in a hundred as you reply, 'You're probably right that I'm often late.' Again, change the critic's wording slightly so that you do not compromise your integrity and agree with something you don't believe."

#### *Agree in Principle*

"The third and final form of clouding involves agreeing with the manipulative critic in principle. This requires simple logic: if X, then Y. 'If everyone in the company were as slow and lazy as you say I am, we would have to file for Chapter 11.'"

#### **L. Skill: Probing**

"Occasionally you will be uncertain about the critic's motivation. Is the critic trying to help you and merely going about it awkwardly? Is the critic actually trying to hurt you under the guise of being helpful? Are the critic's comments actually hiding unspoken beliefs, feelings, and desires? Especially if the critic is someone who matters to you, you may want to probe further into the criticism to answer these questions. This requires listening carefully—a major feat when someone is giving you criticism."

#### **M. Skill: Content-to-Process Shift**

"When your conversation with someone gets stymied because of strong feelings or because of a conflict of needs or wants, shift the focus of the discussion from the topic to an analysis of what is going on between the two of you.

"For example, you are assertively asking your spouse to talk to you more, and he responds with: 'You feel like I'm ignoring you? Why, I remember

on our honeymoon you hardly spoke to me.' Rather than getting into a fruitless argument about the past, you reply: 'We're getting off the point now,' 'We've been derailed into talking about old issues,' or 'You appear to be angry with me.'

"Typical problems that you may have in practicing content-to-process shift for the first time include:

Lapsing into an explanation of why the other person has gotten off the track, when the purpose of this tool is simply to point out that the conversation has been derailed so that it can be brought on track again.

Being accused of psychoanalyzing the other party as a ploy to discount the content-to-process shift. A good response to this is, 'I'm simply stating my own opinion,' and then to return to the original topic.

Being told that the process comment is wrong. Rather than getting into a debate, use acknowledgment or clouding, and then return to the original topic.

## **N. Skill: Time Out**

"When you reach an impasse in a discussion, you may want to postpone the conversation until another time. Time out is useful when the interaction is either too passive or too aggressive. One of you may be silent, crying,

distracted, unready to make a decision, or agreeing with everything the other says. Or perhaps one of you is hitting below the belt by name-calling, bringing up ancient complaints, or being manipulatively critical. If you or the other person feels too pressured to communicate or think at the moment, give yourself time to cool off, reflect on what has been said, and return later with the positive intention of communicating instead of merely proving your point and winning. For example, in response to your teenager who is pouting, you assertively call a time out: This is not a good time to resolve our difference of opinion. Let's talk about it tomorrow."

#### **O. Skill: Slowing Down**

"Don't feel that you have to respond immediately to every situation. You don't have to produce an instant answer. Momentary delays allow you to

1. Be sure that you understand what the speaker has said.
2. Process what has been said.
3. Become aware of what you think, feel, and want in regard to what has been said.
4. Avoid saying things that you may regret later.

"Typical statements that you can use to slow down an interaction include:

1. 'This is too important to race through...let's slow down.'
2. 'That's an interesting point...let me think about it for a moment.'
3. 'Wait a minute. I want to give you my honest answer.'
4. 'Is this what I hear you saying?' (Repeat what you think you heard while taking time to take it in and reflect on it.)

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#### **P. Skill: Assertive Position Statement**

"When you want to express yourself on a specific issue, use an assertive position statement. The issue may be a small one, such as where to have dinner with your mate, or a major one, such as explaining to your boss why you deserve a raise. In any event, you need to express your position clearly and fully, because partial communication can lead to misunderstandings and frustration.

"An assertive position statement includes four important elements:

1. Your perspective on the situation
2. Your feelings
3. Your wants

#### 4. A reinforcement to motivate the other person to cooperate

"The first element is your definition of the problem, or how you see the situation. It's essential for focusing the discussion. Here is your opportunity to share your opinion and beliefs regarding the issue at hand. Try to be nonblaming. Use non-inflammatory language that states the problem as *objectively* as possible. For example: 'It's time to make a decision about where we're going to eat tonight. I know you love Mexican food, but we've eaten at Tijuana Joe's the last three times we've gone out for dinner. We're in a bit of a rut!'

"The second element, your feelings, gives the other person a better understanding of how important an issue is to you. Do not substitute an opinion for a feeling ('I think that Mexican food should be abolished!'). An example of a feeling is, 'I hate Mexican food!' Once they are expressed, your feelings can often play a major role in helping you get what you want, especially when your opinion differs markedly from that of your listener. If nothing else, the listener may be able to relate to and understand your feelings about an issue, even when he or she totally disagrees with your perspective. When you share your feelings, you become less of an adversary. Expression of your feelings often makes possible either an agreement to disagree or a workable compromise. Unfortunately, feelings are often left out of communication.

"The third element, your wants, is best stated in a simple sentence or two. Instead of expecting others to read your mind and magically meet your needs, as in the case of the passive individual, you clearly state your wishes and needs. Try to be specific about what you want. Ask people to change behavior, not attitudes. Rather than assuming that you are always right and entitled to get your way, as an aggressive person might, state your wants as preferences rather than commands. For example, 'I would really like to go to a French restaurant tonight.'

"The fourth element is to motivate the other person to give you what you want by reinforcing his cooperation. Let the other person know how he will benefit by cooperating with you: 'We'll save money,' 'I'll be less tired and more fun to be with,' 'I'll make your favorite meal,' 'You'll have more time to....' If the other person is very resistant, positive reinforcement may not work. In such cases, state the negative consequences for failure to cooperate. When describing negative consequences, do not make threats such as this: 'If you don't pick up after yourself, I'm going to throw out every stitch of your clothing I find on the floor.' This only breeds defensiveness and hostility. Instead, say how you will take care of yourself if your wishes are not accommodated: 'If you won't help with the chores, I'll hire a maid with your allowance money.' 'If you drink, I'll drive.' 'If you don't go with me, I'll invite a friend to go instead.'

"Here are a few examples of the assertive position statement:

"'I've noticed that you've been late to our staff meeting several weeks running. We end up having to stop the meeting to fill you in. I'm really irritated when this meeting runs into the lunch hour, and I would appreciate your making a point of getting here on time. That way, we can break earlier for lunch.'

"'In talking with you this past hour, I'm impressed that we have so much in common. I sure have enjoyed getting acquainted with you. In fact, I haven't had such a good time in months! I'd like to invite you to dinner to continue our conversation.'

"'In reviewing your performance record over the last six months, I see that you haven't met your monthly quota once. We've talked about this before. I'm disappointed with your performance. I want you to reach your quota this month or quite frankly I'm going to ask you to leave.'

"Expressing your thoughts, feelings, and desires in an assertive position statement enhances the chance that the message you want to send will be the message the listener receives. Notice that these assertive position statements do not blame or use attacking labels. The listener is unlikely to become highly defensive, tune out what you are saying, and prepare a counterattack or retreat. The situation is described specifically and objectively without

slipping into negative judgments. By using *I*-messages rather than *you*-messages, you own your opinions, feelings, and wants. When delivering an assertive position statement, use good posture, direct eye contact, and a calm voice.

"An assertive position statement is difficult to ignore or misunderstand. Just in case, check to be sure that your listener is following what you're saying. You can do this by periodically asking the listener to summarize what he or she heard you say. If the synopsis is accurate, you can safely proceed. Don't ask your listener, 'Do you understand?' Instead, you might say, 'I'd like to hear your version of what you heard me saying,' or 'Could you restate what I've just said, so I can be sure I'm making myself clear?'"

Hand out copies of the following form to your clients.

### ***Individual Exercise: Assertive Position Statement***

*Instructions:* Use this form to write assertive position statements for four situations in your life in which you would like to convey your position clearly.

Situation 1: (Describe) \_\_\_\_\_

I think (your perspective) \_\_\_\_\_

I feel \_\_\_\_\_

I want \_\_\_\_\_

If you \_\_\_\_\_

Situation 2: (Describe) \_\_\_\_\_

I think (your perspective) \_\_\_\_\_

I feel \_\_\_\_\_

I want \_\_\_\_\_

If you \_\_\_\_\_

Situation 3: (Describe)

I think \_\_\_\_\_

I feel \_\_\_\_\_

I want \_\_\_\_\_

If you \_\_\_\_\_

Situation 4: (Describe)

I think \_\_\_\_\_

I feel \_\_\_\_\_

I want \_\_\_\_\_

If you \_\_\_\_\_

### Q. Skill: Assertive Listening

"In listening assertively, you focus your attention on the other person so that you can accurately hear the speaker's opinions, feelings, and wishes. Use the techniques of *slowing down* and *time out* when appropriate. Assertive listening involves three steps:

**Prepare:** Become aware of your own feelings and needs. Are you ready to listen? Are you sure that the other person is ready to speak?

**Listen:** Give your full attention to the other person: listen to the speaker's perspective, feelings, and wants. If you are uncertain about one of these three elements, ask the speaker for more information. Examples: 'I'm not quite sure how you view the situation...could you say more about it?' 'How do you feel about this?' 'I don't understand what you want...could be more specific?'

## **R. Skill: Assertive Position Statement—Expressing and Listening**

"When you are involved in a heated conflict with another person, the two of you can take turns using assertive expressing and listening. Many problems are resolved simply by stating clearly what each of you thinks, feels, and wants. This can frequently clear up misunderstandings or create unexpected solutions to problems. Opportunities for this type of communication abound between people who live or work together. Sometimes these opportunities occur spontaneously, but often you need to arrange a mutually convenient time and place to discuss the problem."

## **S. Skill: Workable Compromise**

"When two people's interests are in direct conflict, a fair compromise that totally satisfies both parties is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. Instead, you can look for a workable compromise you can both live with, at least for a while. Here are a few examples of workable compromises (Davis, Eshelman, & McKay, 1988).

- My way when I do it, your way when you do it.
- My way this time, your way next time.
- Part of what I want with part of what you want.
- If you'll do X for me, I'll do Y for you.

- We'll try my way this time; and if you don't like it, you can veto it next time.

"Although a compromise may naturally emerge in your discussion, you sometimes need a brainstorming session to come up with one. Brainstorming a workable compromise involves the following four steps:

1. Make a list of all the alternative solutions you can think of. Let your imaginations run wild while generating as many solutions to the problem as possible. Don't judge any of the suggestions at this stage of brainstorming.
2. Cross off the solutions that are not mutually acceptable.
3. Decide on a workable compromise that you can both live with.
4. Agree to review your compromise after a specific length of time (say, a month). At that time, you can examine the results of your changed behavior. If you aren't both sufficiently satisfied, you can then renegotiate. If your compromise seems to have adequately resolved the conflict, congratulate yourselves.

"Another approach to finding a workable compromise involves asking the other person to counter your proposal. If you find the counterproposal to be unacceptable, be sure that you understand the feelings and needs of the other person regarding the issue at hand, and then come up with another proposal of your own. Continue back and forth until you come up with a

proposal you both can live with.

"A useful question to ask when you're having difficulty arriving at a compromise is: 'What would you need from me to feel okay about doing this my way?' The answer to this question may serve as the basis for a workable compromise."

## Main Interventions

### *Week 1*

#### **Introduction: Starting the Group**

#### **A. Skill: Learning To Identify Your Own Behavior as Assertive, Aggressive, or Passive**

##### *Intervention 1: Individual Exercise—My Typical Responses to Problematic Social Situations*

"Before we discuss what assertive communication is and how it differs from other forms of communication, I would like you to write down how you would typically respond in each of these eight problem situations. We will come back to your responses later in this session." Read aloud or hand out copies of My Typical Responses to Problematic Social Situations for group members to fill out.

## **B. Concept: Three Modes of Communicating**

*Intervention 2: Didactic Presentation (See Concepts and Skills section)*

*Intervention 3: Answer Questions and Invite Comments*

## **C. Skill: Learning To Distinguish Between the Three Modes**

*Intervention 4: Large Group Exercise—Three Modes of Communication*

Read aloud one problematic social scene at a time. Ask for volunteers from the group to label person A's behavior as assertive, aggressive, or passive, and to explain their answers. Encourage discussion of the answers to clarify the three modes of communication. Refer to the answers at the end of the *Six Problematic Social Scenes*.

*Intervention 1: Individual Exercise—My Typical Responses to Problematic Social Situations*

Have your clients imagine that they are person A in the problematic situations. Ask them to label their responses to the situations as assertive, aggressive, or passive.

*Intervention 5: Dyad Exercise*

"Sit down with one other person and review each other's labels of

typical responses to the problematic situations. Discuss any differences of opinion regarding the labels. If you are unable to agree on a label for a particular response, bring the example back to the larger group for discussion."

*Intervention 3: Answer Questions and Invite Comments*

**D. Skill: Defining Criteria for Measuring Change in Assertive Behavior**

*Intervention 6: Demonstration*

Hand out copies of the example and two blank versions of the form called Assertiveness Problems and Goals, from the Concepts and Skills section. Explain: "The purpose of this form is twofold: First, it helps you focus on those social situations in which you have difficulty being assertive and to define how specifically you would like to change your behavior. Second, at the end of the group, when you rescore the form, you will be able to see what progress you've made toward achieving your goals.

"Let's go through the examples as I explain to you how to fill out the form. On the left-hand side, under *Problem*, you briefly describe the situation in which you are having trouble being assertive. Include useful identifying information such as when, where, and with whom you are having the problem. Describe your current behavior. Label it as *passive* or *aggressive*.

Then, under *Goal*, state specifically how you would like to change your behavior. Let's look at a few examples...

"In the second column, marked *Importance*, rank your five situations in relative order of importance to you, with 5 being the most important, and 1 being the least important.

"In the third column, marked *Difficulty*, rate how difficult you think it would be to be assertive in each of these situations (5 = very difficult, 4 = quite difficult, 3 = fairly difficult, 2 = somewhat difficult, and 1 = a little difficult).

"In the far right-hand column, marked *total*, multiply the number given importance by the number for difficulty for each item, then add up the five numbers in this column for a total number. Write this in the bottom right-hand corner.

"Hand in this sheet with your name on it so that I can make copies for you to use during the course of the group. At the end of the group, you will rescore the importance and difficulty level of each item, and compare your original and final scores to evaluate your relative progress. You may want to work on this at home—in which case, you should remember to give it to me at the beginning of our next session."

### *Intervention 1: Individual Exercise*

Have clients fill out this form on their own as instructed. Walk around and answer questions individually; help out anyone who seems to be stuck or confused.

### **Homework Assignment**

Tell your clients to finish this form for homework if necessary and return it the following session.

## **Week 2**

### **Review Homework**

Collect forms Assertiveness Problems and Goals, and make copies for group members to refer to in future sessions; keep the original for final measurement of change. Answer questions. Be sure that members' goals are specific, observable, and reasonably challenging, yet possible to achieve.

### **E. Concept: Basic Premises Underlying the Three Modes of Communication**

*Intervention 2: Didactic Presentation (See Concepts and Skills section)*

### **F. Skill: Identifying Mistaken Traditional Assumptions and Countering Them With Assertive Rights**

*Intervention 2: Didactic Presentation (See Concepts and Skills section)*

*Intervention 1: Individual Exercise (combined with Intervention 2 above)*

Hand out copies of the form called Mistaken Traditional Assumptions and Assertive Rights and then explain: "While children have no choice about the traditional assumptions they were taught to make, adults have the option of choosing whether or not they are going to hold on to beliefs that discourage assertive behavior and create stressful feelings. Each of the following mistaken assumptions violates a legitimate adult right (adapted from Davis, Eshelman, & McKay, 1988). As I elaborate on each of these, put a check mark by any of the *mistaken traditional assumptions* that you still believe in and by any of your *legitimate rights* that you have difficulty accepting. When I'm finished, you will have an opportunity to discuss your views."

"Here is an example of an elaboration on item 2 of the list: It is shameful to make mistakes. How many times as a child did you hear, 'Shame on you!' when you made a mistake? The implication was that if you did something incorrectly, it was bad, and you were bad for doing it. Your value as a person depended on your actions, so it became very important to do well and please others in order to feel good as a person. When self-worth becomes closely tied to performance, then shame is what you feel when you make a mistake. You would merely feel regret if you viewed your mistake as an error in

performance and did not go on to equate performance with self-worth. Regret is a useful emotion in that it motivates you to correct your mistakes. Shame can serve the same function, but it also wears away at your self-esteem and contributes to compulsive overachieving. People who are prone to shame believe that only 100 percent is good enough.

"If you believe that it's shameful to make a mistake, you are likely to avoid taking risks, even if it means forfeiting your rights. People will use your fear and shame about making mistakes to take advantage of you. For example, when you ask for a raise, your boss responds with: 'I seem to recall that you forgot to call in when you were sick earlier this year. That's not the behavior of someone who deserves a raise.' And you back down because you agree with him. The association of mistakes with shame inhibits your assertive behavior.

"Now consider your assertive right to make mistakes. Just as a toddler learns to walk by falling down many times, you learn from your mistakes. Something worth doing right is worth doing wrong at first. Mistakes have the added benefit of keeping you humble. Only God is perfect; it is human to err. This assertive right does not free you from the consequences of your errors; you are still responsible for your actions. But it frees you from the shame of equating your actions with your self-worth. A healthy dose of regret is a sufficient motivator for you to minimize and correct your errors; you do not

need shame.

"When you can simply acknowledge your mistakes and not feel ashamed of them, you become difficult to manipulate. For instance, when your boss points out that you failed to call in sick earlier this year, and uses this as the reason for not giving you a raise, you don't give up in shame. You respond with, 'You're right, I did make that one mistake for which I'm sorry. Now let's talk about what I've done right for the company this year.' Belief in the freedom to make mistakes allows you to learn, take risks, be spontaneous and creative. It supports your assertive behavior."

#### *Intervention 6: Demonstration*

After you have read aloud and expanded upon each of the *mistaken traditional assumptions* and *assertive rights*, ask for a volunteer who is still convinced that his mistaken traditional assumption is correct, or is having difficulty accepting one of his assertive rights, to explain why this is so. Assist him in exploring how he came to this way of thinking. Gently confront him with questions such as: "While this was true for you as a child, do these conditions exist for you as an adult?" "As an adult, do you have alternative ways of coping with these conditions?" "How does this traditional assumption interfere with your assertive behavior?" "How would exercising your assertive right free you to behave more assertively?"

For example, the group leader asks Sharon how she came to believe that it is selfish to put her own needs first. Sharon describes how she learned from her family, her church, and her teachers when she was growing up that it is selfish to think of her own needs before those of others. She was often scolded and spanked for being selfish. Consequently, as an adult, she thinks of others first; and she has a difficult time expressing her own needs. She volunteers that this is a problem in her marriage. The group leader asks her if there are people in her adult life who will scold and spank her if she expresses her needs as an adult. Sharon laughs and says, "Only in my head." The leader asks her what she can do to cope with these critical thoughts. She replies, "When I hear my mother's voice say, 'Don't be so selfish!' I could say to myself, 'I'm an adult now. I decide when I will put myself first and when I will put myself second or third. It's not selfish to put myself first sometimes.'" The group leader suggests that Sharon use this tactic whenever the old critical thoughts come up about being selfish.

#### *Intervention 5: Dyad Exercise*

With one other person, have your clients discuss *mistaken traditional assumptions* that they still believe and *legitimate rights* that they still question. To minimize debate, direct the discussion toward how they came to believe in a particular assumption. Have them explore whether the conditions in which they learned it are still true for them today. If not, do they want to

continue to behave as though they do? For example, if they were slapped, yelled at, or given disapproving glares for interrupting their elders and asking questions as children, they need to ask whether this would happen to them as adults. If the answer is "yes," do they have any options open to them that they did not have as children? Other useful questions include, "How does your mistaken traditional assumption discourage assertive behavior?" and "How would exercising your assertive right as an adult free you to be assertive?"

Often clients state that they know intellectually that the assertive rights are correct, yet they still feel and act according to their mistaken traditional beliefs. Suggest to these individuals that they continue to explore on their own the origin of their mistaken beliefs as they have been doing in group today, as well as consider how their assertive rights support assertive behavior and their mistaken traditional assumptions do not. This is usually best done in writing. Recommend that they repeat daily their assertive rights, and feel and behave as though they believed them. Tell them to post their assertive rights in a place where they can read them often as an external reminder. With enough practice, they will eventually assimilate the knowledge of their assertive rights at more than the intellectual level.

### **G. Skill: Broken Record Technique**

*Intervention 2: Didactic Presentation (See Concepts and Skills section)*

### *Intervention 6: Demonstration*

Have your co-leader or a member of the group role-play the boss in the following example as you go through the steps of the broken record technique playing an assertive employee.

#### *Step 1*

*Assertive employee: (thinking to himself)* I've done overtime four days this week. I'm really sick and tired of all work and no play. I really don't want to stay late tonight. I'm afraid of what my boss will think of me if I say, "no," but I know that I have the right to say no and to put myself first sometimes.

#### *Step 2*

*Assertive employee: (thinking to himself)* Let's see, what excuse could I give him? I could say I can't stay because I have to go to my mother's birthday party. No—he'd tell me I could go later. I'll just tell him that I won't do overtime tonight, and not give him a dumb excuse that he'll figure out a way to get around.

#### *Steps 3 and 4*

*Boss:* I hate to ask you to stay late again, but I have to because of our deadline.

*Assertive employee:* I know the fiscal year ends next week, but I'm not going to work overtime tonight.

*Boss:* I didn't think you were the kind of person who would let me down at a time like this. I really need your help.

*Assertive employee:* I hear that you're disappointed with me for not staying late, but I'm not going to work overtime tonight.

*Boss:* If you don't do the work tonight, when will you do it?

*Assertive employee:* I know that the work has to get done, but I'm not going to work overtime tonight.

*Boss:* Well, I can't force you to stay overtime...but I will certainly be interested in seeing how you get all your work done by the end of next week.

*Assertive employee:* Me too.

### *Intervention 1: Individual Exercise*

"Write down three situations in your life for which the broken record technique would be suitable. For example, you might write down: 'I want to return this dress to the store where I bought it and get my money back.' 'I want to tell my husband not to come in and change the channel when I'm watching a program on TV.' 'I

want to tell my eighteen-year-old son that he must start paying room and board at the beginning of next month if he wants to continue living with me without going to school.'"

### *Intervention 6: Demonstration of Covert Modeling*

"I'm going to demonstrate a way for you to begin practicing using the broken record technique in your mind—the technique of covert modeling. First, I'll select a situation in my life for which the broken record technique

would be appropriate, and then I'll go through the first two steps of the technique. For example, I might decide to return a dress to the store where I recently bought it. I realize that it isn't really what I wanted. I know I have the right to change my mind. I settle on this broken record statement: 'I want to return this dress and get my money back.' I sit or lay down in a comfortable position, close my eyes, and relax.

"I imagine taking the dress up to the store clerk and waiting my turn to talk to her. I pay attention to the sights and sounds around me, and how I feel. I get her attention, hand her the receipt with the dress, and give my broken record statement. I imagine her response: 'We don't give cash on returned items. I can write you out a credit. Would you like to look around the store for something else?' I imagine my response: 'Thank you, no. I'm returning this dress that I bought here and I want my money back.' Tier response: 'I told you our store policy: no cash refunds.' My response: 'I'm hearing your policy for the first time. I'm returning this dress and I want my money back.' Her response: 'I realize that we don't post our policy about returned items, but you could have asked about it when you bought the dress. Perhaps you should talk to the manager. Unfortunately, she's not here today. Maybe you could come back some other time.' My response: 'I bought this dress here and I want my money back.' Her response: 'I really can't help you.' My response: 'Yes you can. I'm returning this dress and I want my money back.' Her response: 'Well, perhaps I can make an exception in your case.' My response:

'I would appreciate that.' I imagine her giving me my money and my walking out of the store, feeling very satisfied with what just transpired."

*Intervention 1: Individual Exercise on Covert Modeling*

*Instructions:* "Starting with your easiest situation, go through the first two steps of the broken record technique. Write down your broken record statement. For instance, you might write, 'I'm returning this dress that I bought here and I want my money back.' You may choose to acknowledge what the other person said or briefly clarify a point, but don't let yourself be distracted from your statement.

"Close your eyes and relax. As in the demonstration I just went through, imagine using your broken record statement in a dialogue in which you also go over how the other person might respond. If you can't imagine yourself successfully using the broken record technique in a dialogue, imagine someone else doing it. You may want to write down the dialogue later as a script. Repeat this process for the other two situations in your life for which the broken record technique would be appropriate."

*Intervention 6: Demonstration of a Role-Play of the Broken Record Technique, Constructive Feedback, and Prompts*

"I would like two volunteers to demonstrate the broken record

technique. Someone who is ready to practice his or her broken record statement—tell us what it is and to whom you want to say it. Give us some background information about the situation, if you think this is needed. To role-play the scene with you, pick a group member who most closely resembles the actual person with whom you would like to use this statement. Then give some examples of what that person would typically say in response to you. Now I'd like you two to role-play this scene, practicing the broken record technique."

When the dyad is through with the role-play, give them constructive feedback. For example, "Jim, I liked the convincing way you role-played Sally's stubborn four-year-old. Your whining tone of voice and insistent questions and complaints gave Sally lots of opportunities to practice her broken record statement." "Sally, you started off great using the broken record technique, then got side-tracked into explaining. Stick with your broken record statement; it's a good one. You have a beautiful smile, but it doesn't convey that you mean business the way the tone of your voice does. Make your facial expression congruent with that of your voice and words. Let's do this role-play one more time, and I'll give you a reminder to look stern when you start smiling by pointing to my lips like this." (Demonstrate gesture.)

After the second role-play, reinforce the good points and give constructive feedback for further improvements. Thank the two volunteers,

and ask for two more volunteers to role-play another instance of the broken record. Have one of them go through a brief explanation of a situation and how the other person should typically respond. Ask for two more volunteers to coach the players.

Tell the coaches about their job: "At the end of the role-play, say what you think worked, positively reinforcing assertive verbal and nonverbal behavior. Suggest increasing particular assertive behaviors such as eye contact, voice volume, use of the broken record technique, and acknowledging the other person without being sidetracked. This shaping of appropriate behavior is a nonthreatening way of giving constructive feedback. If the player forgets to use the broken record—perhaps because she is manipulated into defending her position—point out how the role-play was working up to that point, and suggest that she try to stick with her original broken record statement or else modify it slightly if it seems flawed." Unless there are some questions, go ahead with the role-play, followed by constructive feedback from the coaches.

Stop the coaches if they give negative criticism. (For example, "You only used the broken record once before you started rationalizing why he should do what you want him to." "Your voice is too soft." "Your acknowledgment of what the other person said sounded phony.") Ask the coaches to restate their negative criticism as positive feedback. (For example, "You used the broken

record once. You could continue to use it, instead of explaining why he should do what you want him to." "What you were saying was good. Try saying it even louder next time." "You acknowledged what the other person was saying; perhaps you could say the same thing with more sincerity." Encourage the coaches to be specific and give examples, if necessary, to clarify your point. For example, the term "sincerity" is vague; the coach who uses it might demonstrate what he means by role-playing a few "sincere" acknowledgments. Have the coaches suggest helpful visual prompts during the role-play to remind the person practicing being assertive to speak up (point to your throat), make eye contact (point to your eyes), or get back to the broken record (make a circle in the air with your finger).

Invite the entire group to give constructive feedback when the coaches are through. Add your own feedback at the end.

Assuming that the person practicing the broken record technique has room for improvement, she can repeat the same scene, incorporating the feedback that she has just received. At the end of the second role-play, again have the coaches give constructive feedback, with emphasis on what has improved and what can be further improved upon. Thank the volunteers.

*Intervention 7: Exercise for Group of Four (if time permits)*

"Form groups of four to practice your easiest broken record situation in

the way just demonstrated. Two people will role-play a broken record scene while the other two will serve as coaches. Everyone should get to role-play his or her broken record twice. I'll be walking around, listening in, and answering questions."

*Intervention 3: Answer Questions and Invite Comments*

**Homework on the Broken Record Technique**

"Before I give you your homework, let me suggest that you keep a written record of your assignments, including my instructions and a brief description of what you actually do and when. Include any insights and questions that come to mind. This will increase the likelihood of successfully completing your homework.

"Here is your assignment for this week. Practice imagining successfully using the broken record technique in the situations you've identified. Other ways to practice at home include writing out the dialogue in script form, role-playing the dialogue in front of a mirror, or recording it on audio- or videotape. You can play both roles yourself, or enlist the help of a partner to play opposite you. Finally, use the broken record technique in real life. After your experiment, ask yourself what worked and what needed improvement. Remember to give yourself credit for practicing a new behavior, no matter what the outcome was."

## *Week 3*

### **Review Homework**

Return copies of Assertiveness Problems and Goals and suggest that clients bring them back each week to refer to when asked for examples of problem scenes to role-play.

Review the five steps of the broken record technique. Ask what group members did during the week with the technique and what questions and comments they have about their particular experiences.

#### *Intervention 6: Demonstration*

Have two volunteers role-play for the group a broken record situation with which one of them is having difficulty. Coach the dyad, modeling good coaching for the group. Review coaching skills, with emphasis on constructive feedback.

#### *Intervention 3: Answer Questions and Invite Comments*

#### *Intervention 7: Exercise for Group of Four*

Have all group members role-play a scene of their choice, using the broken record technique, in groups of four (see Week 2, Intervention 7).

## **H. Confronting Your Fears About Being Assertive**

*Intervention 2: Didactic Presentation (See Concepts and Skills section)*

*Intervention 6: Demonstration*

Hand out copies of and/or go over the example of a young woman answering the nine questions under Confronting My Fears About Being Assertive (in Concepts and Skills section).

*Intervention 1: Individual Exercise*

Give your clients at least two copies of the form called Confronting My Fears About Being Assertive. Have them fill out a form for one problem situation as you just demonstrated. In answering question 2, you can suggest that they review their mistaken traditional assumptions and assertive rights.

*Intervention 6: Demonstration*

Have one person volunteer to go through his or her answers to the questions in Confronting My Fears About Being Assertive. Assist the volunteer with any of the questions that presented difficulties.

*Intervention 3: Answer Questions and Invite Comments*

*Intervention 5: Dyad Exercise*

"Get together with one other person to discuss your answers to the nine questions. Get feedback. Reverse roles. Bring any unanswered questions and comments back to the larger group when we reassemble."

*Intervention 3: Answer Questions and Invite Comments*

Reassemble the group and open the floor to questions and comments.

**Homework Assignment**

"For each of your five specific assertiveness problems and goals, answer the nine questions under *Confronting My Fears About Being Assertive*. Continue practicing broken record technique." Remind clients to keep a written record of their homework experiences."

***Week 4***

**Review Homework**

"What did you do with the broken record technique this past week?" Answer questions and listen to comments. "Who had a problem answering the nine questions under *Confronting My Fears About Being Assertive* for specific assertiveness problems and goals?" Ask for a volunteer to go through the nine answers, and give assistance as needed. Take questions and

comments. Explain that the group will be returning to these nine questions as people work on their specific assertiveness problems and goals in later sessions.

### **I. Concept: Criticism as a Form of Manipulation**

*Intervention 2: Didactic Presentation (See Concepts and Skills section)*

### **J. Skill: Acknowledgment**

*Intervention 2: Didactic Presentation (See Concepts and Skills section)*

*Intervention 4: Large Group Exercise*

"I'm going to go around the room and criticize each person so that you will all have an opportunity to practice the assertive skill of acknowledging criticism. Be sure not to agree with something I say that down deep you think is incorrect. Try to rephrase my criticism in such a way that you can agree with it. For example, if I say, 'You were ten minutes late to group today,' and you know that you were late, but not exactly how late, you might say: 'You're right, I was late today.' If I say, 'Your hair is blown every which way,' you might respond with, 'Yes, I suppose it is.' If I say, 'Your shoes are scuffed up and need to be polished,' you might come back with, 'Yes, they sure are scuffed up and need to be polished.'"

Take care to give minor criticisms with which your clients are likely to agree without being embarrassed or hurt.

#### **K. Skill: Clouding**

*Intervention 2: Didactic Presentation (See Concepts and Skills section: Agree in Part)*

*Intervention 4: Large Group Exercise*

"I'm going to go around the room and criticize each one of you from the point of view of a nasty, manipulative critic. Remember that as a manipulative critic, I'm less interested in being objective than in putting you down any way I can. I want you to respond by agreeing with some part of what I have to say, and ignoring the rest. For example, if I say, 'You're always making a mess of our home; you never clean up. I always know where you've been by the trail of dirty clothes and dishes you leave behind. Why can't you be more considerate like your sister?' you might respond with, 'You're right, I don't always pick up after myself.'"

*Intervention 2: Didactic Presentation (See Concepts and Skills section: Agree in Probability)*

*Intervention 4: Large Group Exercise*

"I'm going to go around the room again and criticize you from the point of view of the manipulative critic, and I want you to respond by clouding with agreement in probability. For instance, if I say, 'You wear the strangest combination of clothes of anyone I have ever had in one of my groups. Why do you need to wear four shirts at one time? Aren't you being a little redundant? Make up your mind—pants or a skirt, not both. You look like a clown!' you might respond with, 'I probably am wearing the most unusual combination of clothes of anyone who has ever participated in one of your groups.' If I say, 'The dinner you made us was terrible. The vegetables were mush, the meat was burned, the rice was cold. The army serves better food than this,' you might respond with, 'The army may very well serve better food than this.'"

*Intervention 2: Didactic Presentation (See Concepts and Skills section: Agree in Principle)*

*Intervention 4: Large Group Exercise*

"I, your not-so-friendly, manipulative critic, will once again blast you with criticism. You will respond by clouding with agreement in principle. For instance, I might say, 'You did a lousy job washing my car. It still has bird doo-doo on it, for heaven's sake. You're a bunch of lazy half-wits. You're not going to be in business long with shoddy work like this!' You might respond with, 'You're right, we won't be in the car-washing business long if we leave bird doo-doo on a car.'"

## Homework Assignment

Suggest that group members write down their assignment.

- Continue practicing the broken record technique.
- Begin practicing acknowledging and clouding when you're criticized. Review your experience afterwards, and ask yourself, 'What did I say that was effective? How can I improve on my response next time?' Since this may be an infrequent occurrence, take advantage of any criticism you hear directed at someone else, and imagine how you would respond with acknowledgment or clouding. You can even do this when listening to criticism on TV dramas. Take ten minutes to imagine past instances of being criticized, or occasions that are likely to occur in the future. Imagine successfully using acknowledging and clouding.

## *Week 5*

### Review Homework

"How did you handle criticism this week? What techniques did you use?" Review how to use clouding and acknowledgment.

#### *Intervention 4: Large Group Exercise*

Have two people volunteer to role-play a situation in which one of them

is having difficulty using these two skills. Invite the group to give constructive feedback. Give pointers on constructive feedback as needed.

## **L. Skill: Probing**

*Intervention 2: Didactic Presentation (See Concepts and Skills section)*

*Intervention 6: Demonstration*

With a co-leader or a client, role-play the following example of probing:

*Critic:* Late again, I see. One of these days you'll arrive at work only to find that we've all gone home for the day.

*You:* What is it about my being late that bothers you?

*Critic:* There's no such thing as a free lunch. You've been getting away with working less than the rest of us, and I'm mad!

*You:* What is it about my working less than you that makes you mad?

*Critic:* I haven't had a vacation in over a year, and I work overtime every night. You waltz out of here every night at five o'clock and get away with it. It's just not fair.

*You:* What do you think about this lack of fairness?

*Critic:* Well, now that you've pinned me down, I guess I don't really believe that life is fair. I guess I feel pretty stupid for working so hard when you're living proof that I don't have to.

"In this example, probing the critic was useful for placing responsibility

for the dissatisfaction where it belonged: with the critic. Often, the critic doesn't budge from his righteous position and isn't amenable to probing. When you've assured yourself that the criticism is manipulative, shift from probing to clouding. If you agree with the criticism, acknowledge it.

"Be careful when you probe that you do not either verbally or nonverbally give the message 'So what's bugging you now?' (which implies that you see the other person as a nag). If used properly, probing can turn a manipulative critic into an assertive person who directly expresses his or her thoughts, feelings, and wishes while also respecting yours."

*Intervention 7: Exercise for Group of Four*

"In groups of four, take turns practicing probing. Two people serve as coaches, while the third person plays the critic, and the fourth person probes the criticism to determine if it is constructive or manipulative, or if the critic is willing to admit a hidden issue such as unmet needs, wishes, or hurt feelings. If it's apparent that the critic is just being manipulative, shift to clouding. If the prober agrees with the criticism, he or she can simply acknowledge it. For the purpose of this exercise, let's have the critic complain about the housework not getting done."

*Intervention 3: Answer Questions and Invite Comments*

## **M. Skill: Content-to-Process Shift**

*Intervention 2: Didactic Presentation (See Concepts and Skills section)*

*Intervention 6: Demonstration*

Role-play this example with your co-leader or client.

*Parent:* Okay, now that you've watched your favorite TV show, you have to do your homework.

*Child:* Come on, just one more show. It's a special and only half an hour long.

*Parent:* No, you have to do your homework now. (This is the broken record statement.)

*Child:* You let Anna Lisa stay up for special programs. You're being unfair to me.

*Parent:* You're getting us off the track by bringing up how I treat another person. You have to do your homework now. (Content-to-process shift and broken record.)

*Child:* You always treat her better than me. You never give me a break. You're always on my case. I hate you.

*Parent:* I hear that you're really angry at me, but you have to do your homework now. (Content-to-process shift and broken record.)

*Child:* None of my friends' parents would do this to their kids. They love their kids and want them to be happy.

*Parent:* You're changing the subject again. You have to do your homework now. (Content-to-process shift and broken record.)

*Child:* I remember last weekend you let me stay up until after midnight watching a movie. There have been lots of week-nights when you've let me stay up late. Why not tonight?

*Parent:* You're avoiding doing your homework by bringing up things that happened in the past. You have to do your homework now.

*Child:* You sure are tough.

### *Intervention 7: Exercise for Group of Four*

"Get into groups of four, with one person practicing content-to-process shift. This person can role-play a parent or boss who is trying to convince his child or employee that he should do his chores or work, using the broken record and content-to-process shift. The second person role-plays the child or employee who tries to derail the parent or boss. The other two people serve as coaches who give constructive feedback at the end of the role-play."

## **N. Skill: Time Out**

*Intervention 2: Didactic Presentation (See Concepts and Skills section)*

## **O. Skill: Slowing Down**

*Intervention 2: Didactic Presentation (See Concepts and Skills section)*

## **Homework Assignment**

"You have now learned seven assertive skills for dealing with people who are manipulative and/or uncooperative: the broken record technique, acknowledgment, clouding, probing, content-to-process shift, time out, and slowing down. You must practice these skills so that you will remember to use them instead of reverting to your old habitual responses to manipulation. You can do this in your imagination, by writing out a script, and/or by role-playing alone or with a partner. After every real interaction with a manipulative or uncooperative person, review your response. In what ways were you effective in dealing with the manipulation? How might you improve your performance next time? Remember to give yourself credit for any improvement and build on it."

## *Week 6*

### **Review Homework**

"What did you do with the manipulative and/or uncooperative people in your life this week? How did you practice your seven assertive skills to deal with manipulative people?"

#### *Intervention 4: Large Group Exercise*

Have two volunteers role-play for the large group a problem situation of their own involving manipulative or uncooperative people. Invite

constructive feedback from the group. Hold your own feedback until the group has responded. Repeat this exercise with other volunteers as needed and as time permits.

*Intervention 3: Answer Questions and Invite Comments*

**P. Skill: Assertive Position Statement**

*Intervention 2: Didactic Presentation (See Concepts and Skills section)*

*Intervention 1: Individual Exercise*

Give group members the handout shown in the Concepts and Skills section and have them fill it out.

*Intervention 5: Dyad Exercise*

"With one other person in the group, go over your Assertive Position Statement form and get constructive feedback. Rewrite your statements if necessary. Then reverse roles."

**Q. Skill: Assertive Listening**

*Intervention 2: Didactic Presentation (See Concepts and Skills section)*

**R. Skill: Assertive Position Statement—Expressing and Listening**

*Intervention 2: Didactic Presentation (See Concepts and Skills section)*

*Intervention 6: Demonstration*

Role-play the following with a co-leader or client:

*Wife:* I'd like to talk to you about the toilet seat. Is this a good time?

*Husband:* Not really. How about after the game...it should be over in ten minutes.

*Wife: (after the game is over)* This may seem like a small thing to you, but it's been bothering me ever since we got married. I think that the correct position for the toilet seat is down. I'm sick and tired of having to put the toilet seat down when I have to use it or landing on the cold porcelain when I go to the bathroom at night. I get irritated with you for leaving the seat up.

*Husband:* Well, I can understand your preference for having the seat down, and I can hear your anger. To be frank with you, I prefer the seat up. I'd rather not have to fiddle with the toilet seat every time I went to use it.

*Wife:* I feel the same way—and I'm often in more of a hurry than you are!

*Husband:* I think you're being self-centered. It's just as important for me to have the seat up as it is for you to have it down. Your demand seems unfair to me. I'd rather that you leave the seat in the up position for *me*."

*Wife:* No way—but I see your point. I feel stuck. Even though I may be asking for something that you think is unfair, I still want my way on this.

*Husband:* Look, if you'd be willing to put the seat up after you use it next month, I'll put it down after I use it this month.

*Wife:* Okay—but let's talk again after the second month to see if we want to try working out another solution. Maybe we need to think about building another bathroom!

*Husband:* I'm game—let's try the cheaper fix first!

*Intervention 7: Exercise for Groups of Four*

"Form into groups of four people. Two people will practice the assertive position statement using assertive expressing and listening. Here's a ready-made problem situation: Your plans for the weekend have fallen through. Each of you has a different alternative plan. Express and listen to your respective positions on this problem and see if a mutually acceptable compromise naturally emerges regarding how to spend your weekend together. If it doesn't, that's okay. We'll be discussing Workable Compromise next. The two remaining people will serve as coaches who give feedback at the completion of the role-play. Then the coaches can role-play this same problem situation while the first two people coach. I'll take questions and comments as I walk around and at the conclusion of the exercise."

*Intervention 3: Answer Questions and Invite Comments*

**S. Skill: Workable Compromise**

*Intervention 2: Didactic Presentation (See Concepts and Skills section)*

*Intervention 6: Demonstration*

Role-play this example with your co-leader or a client. "Here is an

example of arriving at a workable compromise, using brainstorming:

*Jack:* Okay, we've both clearly stated how we see the problem, how we feel about it, and what we want; yet no easy solution has emerged that we can both live with. You want to spend our vacation in the mountains, and I want to spend it by the sea. Let's brainstorm and see if we can come up with some new solutions that we both would enjoy and that we haven't thought of yet.

*Cynthia:* That's okay with me. I'll do the writing. Here's one alternative that neither of us has thought of before: let's go to the desert!

*Jack:* Forget that, I can't stand the heat.

*Cynthia:* No judgments at this point. We just put down whatever comes to mind.

*Jack:* Okay—sorry. Let's have a beach vacation this summer, and a mountain vacation next year. Or we could spend three days in the mountains and four days by the sea. Or we could find a mountain sticking out of the ocean.

*Cynthia:* Let's go to Hawaii—lots of ocean and mountains. Or we could go to Lake Tahoe...there's water *and* mountains.

*Jack:* We could take separate vacations. We could stay home.

*Cynthia:* We could go visit my family in Montana.

*Jack:* We could go visit my family in Rhode Island.

*Cynthia:* I'm ready to stop this stage of brainstorming; I've run out of creative ideas.

*Jack:* Me too. Let's cross off the alternatives that aren't acceptable to either of us. I refuse to go to the desert for my vacation! I don't want to visit your family or mine just now. I don't want to take separate vacations or stay home. That covers my vetoes.

*Cynthia:* I don't want to go on a beach vacation this time and postpone being in the

mountains until next year. I don't want to split our time between the mountains and the sea...too much driving if we try to do that in this state. We don't have the money to fly to Hawaii...nice idea though.

*Jack:* 'Well, that leaves us with Lake Tahoe. Certainly not my first choice, but I can live with it.'

*Cynthia:* 'Great. Maybe we can afford Hawaii next year!'"

### *Intervention 5: Dyad Exercise*

"In dyads, use brainstorming to arrive at a workable compromise regarding how to spend \$10,000 that the two of you have just won in a contest. To make this more interesting, let's add that you can spend the money on only one thing."

### *Intervention 3: Answer Questions and Invite Comments*

## **Homework Assignment**

Instructions: "Practice assertive position statement, assertive listening, and workable compromise in your imagination, in role-plays, and in real life. Next week we'll practice putting these three skills together in different problem situations."

## ***Week 7***

## **Review Homework**

"What did you do with the assertive position statement, assertive listening, and workable compromise?" Briefly review these three skills with the group.

### *Intervention 4: Large Group Exercise*

Ask for volunteers to role-play problem situations in which one or more of these three assertive skills would be appropriate. Invite the group to coach the players with you.

## **Working on Assertiveness Problems and Goals**

### *Intervention 1: Individual Exercise*

Review your Assertiveness Problems and Goals list. You probably have at least a couple of problems or goals that you have not practiced yet in the group or at home. Go over these in your mind, and imagine role-playing them, using the skills you've learned in the group.

### *Intervention 4: Large Group Exercise*

Have one client volunteer to role-play a situation from his list of assertiveness problems and goals. Have him briefly describe to the group the

problem situation and his goal. If he has any fears or concerns about being assertive in this particular situation, ask the nine questions under *Confronting Your Fears About Being Assertive* in the *Concepts and Skills* section. Remind him of his assertive rights as needed. Ask him what assertive skills he imagines himself using. Suggest others, if appropriate. Have him select a volunteer to role-play the scene with him (this should be someone who most closely resembles the person with whom he'd be interacting in real life). Have him explain to the volunteer how this person would typically respond. After the role-play, ask the two volunteers to share what worked for them and what needed improvement, then ask the same question of the larger group. Have the volunteers repeat the role-play if necessary after receiving constructive feedback.

If your group is small enough, or if you believe that your clients need your close supervision, continue to work in this manner on other clients' assertiveness problems and goals. If your group is large, or if you believe that your clients can work effectively on their assertiveness problems and goals in smaller groups, break up your clients into groups of four. Circulate among the small groups to assist and answer questions.

### **Homework Assignment**

"Continue practicing new assertiveness skills. Practice applying

assertiveness techniques to your specific problem situations in your imagination, in role-plays, and in real life."

## **Week 8**

### **Review Homework**

Ask for questions and comments regarding homework.

#### *Intervention 4: Large Group Exercise*

Same as for Week 7, Skill T (Working on Assertiveness Problems and Goals, Intervention 4).

#### *Intervention 7: Exercise for Group of Four*

Use this iIntervention if your group is large or if you feel that your clients do not need your close supervision to work on their assertiveness problems and goals. Otherwise, continue with Intervention 4.

"I want you to break into groups of four now to role-play being assertive, using one of the five items on the form you filled out for assertiveness problems and goals. Present your problem and goal to your small group. If you have not satisfactorily completed the nine questions under Confronting Your Fears About Being Assertive for the situation you are about

to role-play, or if you are not sure of your rights in this situation, ask your partners in the small group for assistance. If you're uncertain about which assertiveness skills would be best to use, ask the opinion of members of your group. When you're ready to role-play, ask one of the other three people to be your partner; the remaining two people can serve as coaches who will give you feedback at the conclusion of the role-play. I'll be circulating around the groups to provide assistance as needed. Repeat the role-play, incorporating the coaches' feedback if you feel that it would be helpful. Otherwise, move on to the next person who will present his or her assertiveness problem and goal for discussion and role-playing. Each person in the group should get a chance to work on at least one assertiveness problem and goal."

#### *Intervention 1: Individual Exercise*

Return copies of the Assertiveness Problems and Goals form to your clients with the original scores blanked out or folded over. Remind your clients how to score it. After they have completed the computations, have them compare their new score with their original score to evaluate their relative progress. Suggest that people who finish before others take a quiet individual break.

#### *Intervention 4: Large Group Exercise*

Ask all clients to share their initial and final scores on the Assertiveness

Problems and Goals form, to talk briefly about what they've learned in the group, and what they still need to work on. As time permits, give clients feedback regarding your observations of their progress and work left to do. Also, as time permits, invite feedback from the group on each client's progress and unfinished work.

## Relapse

*Intervention 2: Didactic Presentation (See Relapse Prevention below)*

*Intervention 4: Large Group Exercise*

Ask for feedback about the group and for any remaining questions or comments before ending the final session.

## Relapse Prevention

Throughout the group you will be reinforcing a model for ongoing individualized assertiveness practice. You can mention its elements explicitly in your closing remarks:

"Replacing passive and aggressive communication with assertive communication requires a lifetime commitment. It's easy to revert to old patterns at times when you are under stress, such as when you're tired,

hungry, afraid, angry, guilty, ashamed, or trying to do too much. As soon as you catch yourself—whether moments or hours later—review what happened. Ask yourself what was going on that prevented you from being assertive. Remember that you have a right to make mistakes: learn from them rather than dwelling on them. Review your assertive rights. Explore your fears to make sure that they're realistic, and ask yourself if it is worth it to you to be assertive in this situation. Focus on the constructive things you said or did that you can build on, so that the next time that situation comes up you'll be more assertive. Ask yourself what assertiveness skills you could use the next time you're in that situation. Role-play communicating assertively in that situation in your mind, in front of a mirror, on tape, or with a friend. Include what you think the other person would say. When you anticipate a difficult situation, mentally role-play communicating assertively including the other person's responses."

## **Noncooperation**

Homework compliance is the major problem in an assertiveness training group. As a group leader, you can increase your clients' motivation to do homework in the following ways (adapted from Davis, 1989):

1. Explain clearly the purpose of the homework.
2. Describe the homework, using simple step-by-step instructions.

3. Demonstrate the homework.
4. Give clients an opportunity to practice any new technique in class and to ask questions before practicing it at home.
5. Have clients keep a written record of their homework progress, along with any comments and questions.
6. Review homework at the beginning of the next session, giving clients an opportunity to discuss their successes and problems and to ask questions.

Do not chastise clients who don't do their homework. People learn in different ways. Keep in mind that some clients will go through the entire group doing little or no homework and yet will appear to have benefited from the group. They seem to pick up what they need by attending the group and doing the exercises while there.

As the group leader, you are responsible only for *teaching* assertiveness skills; it is the clients' responsibility and option to use these skills as they see fit. Reiterate that they have the right to say "no" to any situation they find too uncomfortable.

## Resistance

See the nine questions under *Confronting Your Fears About Being Assertive* in the *Concepts and Skills* section. Also look at the chapters in this

book on anger and shyness.

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