
Session 6

Social problem solving: Techniques to promote self-control

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1. Introduction

Appealing to the strength and intelligence in every adolescent, Perkinson (1997: 267) remarks: " We can reach our full potential in life only when we meet our problems head on, accept responsibility for them, and work toward resolution". Thus, dealing with problems, as a natural consequence of the confluence of forces in your life, is an important skill to develop. The aim of session six is to enhance participants' social problem-solving skills by specifically focussing on techniques to promote self-control. An approach grounded on the premise, that the strengthening of this protective factor will reduce the likelihood and level of substance use.

Aspects covered in Session six, include:

- Delayed gratification,
- Rules,
- How to solve problems, and
- Responsibility.

Table 6 provides the planned course of Session 6.

Table 6: Social problem solving, techniques to promote self-control

Session 6	
09:00- 09:10 (10 minutes)	Introduction Exercise 1: "What I'd like to learn"
09:10 – 09:25 (15 minutes)	Delayed gratification Exercise 2: Things I want in life
09:25 –09:40 (15 minutes)	Rules Exercise 3: Breaking rules
09:40 – 09:55 (15 minutes)	How to solve problems Exercise 4: Problem solving
09:55 –10:10 (15 minutes)	Responsibility Exercise 5: Taking responsibility

After the introduction, the following exercise is a good starting point.

Exercise 1: "What I'd like to learn"

Participants brainstorm the question, "What I need to know about Problem solving: Techniques to promote self-control" for 5 – 10 minutes. All the answers are written on a blackboard or flipchart, and referred back to during the session to ensure these needs are met.

2. Delayed gratification (reward)

Self-control and/or self-discipline require training and practice. This implies that we need to work. However, work does not always feel good, as work is the expenditure of energy. Yet, when we expend energy, things change.

For example, nearly everybody would like to be a champion, but to be a champion; you will have to work at it. Professional athletes train every day. It is the only way to excel. They cannot win a race every day, but they can train for the race every day. They must constantly keep in excellent physical and mental condition. They have to be practiced in their sport, to do things automatically. The same holds true for most things in life, to do something well, we must persevere, practice, and learn how to set long-term goals.

Exercise 2: Things I want in life

Take a piece of paper and write down some of the things you wanted in your life that you did not get, because you didn't work hard enough. Perhaps you wanted to play a musical instrument, or go out with someone special. *Find three things that you wanted, but did not get.* Write those things down and take a long look at each of them. What would it have taken you to achieve each of these goals? What work needed to be done, that you did not do? However, nothing reasonable is out of your grasp if you work hard enough. *Write down the steps you needed to take to achieve that goal(s).*

Next, divide into small groups of four or five, where participants share their thoughts and explain the role of delayed gratification in goal achievement. Participants then return to the plenary for a general discussion about the above.

3. Rules

Rules do not exist to deny you pleasure. They exist to protect you from pain. If you break the rules, you will hurt – it is as simple as that. Consistently obeying the rules takes self-control. You must decide that the rules are for your own good. The legislature did not make the speed laws to deny people the pleasure of driving fast. They made the rules to keep people safe.

Many of us who have a difficult time with self-control or self-discipline, are raised in homes where the rules are inconsistent. This is confusing to a child. Sometimes our parents would enforce the rules, and sometimes they would not. Sometimes we would be punished, and sometimes we would get no punishment at all. Sometimes our parents would do the same things they told us not to do. They would tell us not to hit others, for example, and then they would hit us. This teaches a child that rules are not important.

A person without rules is a person with no self-respect. Only when we respect ourselves do we set limits on what we will and will not do. Children know that people who love them set limits for them. Consequently, there is no one unhappier than a child with no rules. They are allowed to be the ruler of the home. This monarch of the house will demand increasingly until they make themselves miserable. Are you important enough to keep safe? If you are, you need rules.

Exercise 3: Breaking rules

Write down some rules you have broken on a piece of paper. For example, write down two times when you lied, or two times when you stole. Write the *situation* down as honestly as you can. You had some good *reasons* for doing those things, did you not? Why did you do it? What good came out of it? Now write down the *consequences* of breaking each of those rules. How did you feel about yourself? How did you feel about the other people? What happened?

Now, look at each situation and ask yourself this question: "Did breaking this rule help me grow and reach my full potential as a person? Did I honour myself, others and God?" You will find that breaking rules results in pain, your pain. Take lying for example. We lie to avoid getting into trouble. Now this works in the short run, but in the end, it is an interpersonal disaster. We want people to love us. If we lie, people do not know us, so they cannot love us. In the end, if you lie, you will be lonely and you will hurt.

To love you must be self-disciplined. Love is an action, not a feeling. Love is work. Love takes time, energy and commitment. To do unto others, as you would have them do unto you is not always easy, but you will not experience joy unless you love like this. To love, you must be consistent. If you are selfish, if you always come first, you will hurt, you will be deprived of the joy of giving unselfishly to others.

4. How to solve problems

Life is an endless puzzle of problems that need to be solved. Problem solving is challenging, necessary, and fun. However, it needs to be practiced enough times so that it gets to be automatic.

Exercise 4: Problem solving

Each participant writes down a personal problem. Then the social worker leads the group through the problem-solving steps.

- (a) Step one is to formulate the problem. Did you describe the problem clearly? How do you feel about it? What do you want to see happen?
- (b) Then make a list of options. What are all of the possible ways you can deal with this problem? Get input from others you trust. Ask other people to give you alternatives of action. You will be surprised. Other people will come up with good ideas you did not have.
- (c) Now consider each option carefully and decide which choice will help you to grow into the person you want to be. If people are involved, remember to treat them the way you would want to be treated.
- (d) Put the option you have chosen into action.
- (e) Evaluate the effect of your action on the original problem. This gives you information about how to solve future problems.

Through this exercise, a basic understanding of the problem solving process (i.e. problem; options; decision; action; evaluation) and an increased confidence amongst participants that they can solve problems is established.

5. Responsibility

To solve a problem effectively, you must accept that problem as your problem. If you blame the problem on something else, you are helpless. It is easy to feel this way, but it is self-defeating. For example: "I would be okay if they would just leave me alone." This, however, is a cry of someone who is defeated by life. In short, it is never effective to blame other people for your problems. In fact, there is always something you can do to make things better. You have great power and influence over your own life. If you sit and do nothing, nothing will change.

Exercise 5: Taking responsibility

Each participant (a) write down one time they got into trouble, and (b) think about the choices that lead to the problem. What did you do that ended with you in trouble? Identify the choices you made along the way that led to the problem.

Do not blame anyone else, just look at your own behaviour. If you look closely, you will see that a series of choices, your choices, led to these events. Accidents happen, yes, but most of what happens to you is a result of your choices. Think of how scary the world would be if some other person had the power to make you happy or unhappy. No one has that power but you.

Think of yourself as a gift to the world. There has never been anyone like you. There will never be anyone like you. You owe the world only one thing, to be different. Only you can do this. Only you can be responsible for what you do. You will change the course of history

because you were here. Maybe you will change things for the good, maybe for the bad, maybe you will change things a little, maybe a lot, but you will definitely change things. Things will be different because you were here. You have a great responsibility to be yourself.

Session 7

**Social problem solving:
Relieving stress, anxiety and pressure**

Social problem solving: Relieving stress, anxiety and pressure

1. Introduction

Social problem-solving skills is an individual protective factor that balance risks to substance abuse, by either reducing the impact of the risk or changing the way a person responds to the risks. Consequently, this session focuses on the enhancement of participants' social problem-solving skills by focussing on adaptive coping strategies to relief stress, anxiety and pressure.

Session seven, thus includes the following aspects:

- Stress,
- Relaxation,
- Exercise, and
- Lifestyle.

The following Table provides the planned course for Session seven.

Table 7: Social problem solving, relieving stress, anxiety and pressure

Session 7	
09:00- 09:05 (5 minutes)	Recap and introduction

Session 7	
09:05 – 09:25 <i>(20 minutes)</i>	Stress Exercise 1: Experience and cope with stress
09:25 – 09:35 <i>(10 minutes)</i>	Relaxation Exercise 2: Relaxation exercise Exercise 3: Relaxation at home
09:35 – 09:45 <i>(10 minutes)</i>	Exercise Exercise 4: Physical fitness
09:45 – 10:05 <i>(20 minutes)</i>	Your lifestyle Exercise 5: Problem solving Exercise 6: Identifying pleasurable activities Social skills
10:05 – 10:10 <i>(5 minutes)</i>	Recap

2. Stress

Everyone has stress and everyone needs to learn how to manage the stress in his or her life. Stress is the generalized physiological response to a stressor. A stressor is any demand made on the body. A stressor can be anything that mobilizes the body for change. This can include psychological or physiological loss, absence of stimulation, excessive stimulation, frustration of an anticipated reward, conflict or the presentation of and anticipation of painful events.

The stress response is good and adaptive. It activates the body for problem solving. Stress is destructive only when it is chronic. The overstressed body breaks down. Initially, the body produces certain chemicals to handle the stressful situation. Initially, these chemical changes are adaptive, but in the end, they are destructive. Severe or chronic stress has been linked to irreversible disease, including kidney impairment, high blood pressure, ulcer and a compromised immune system that can result in increased infections and cancer.

When animals are put in a situation with an unsolvable problem, they ultimately get sick. They fall victim to a wide variety of physical and mental disorders. Under chronic stress, the organism ultimately dies.

It seems that everyone has a genetic predisposition to break down in a certain organ system when under chronic stress. Some people are depressed, some get ulcers, and some become substance dependent. As an adolescent, you must learn how to deal with stress in ways other than by using drugs. You must learn to use the stress signals that your body gives you to help you solve problems. If you cannot solve the problem yourself, you need to get some help.

Identifying how participants define, experience and cope with stress is thus important. Exercise 1 illustrates this clearly.

Exercise 1: Experience and cope with stress

Divide participants into small groups of four to five people. Then give them each a piece of flipchart paper to write down three sources of stress in their lives. There after each small group is asked to try to reach agreement about (a) what the three main sources of stress are for everybody in that group, and (b) positive coping strategies for this. Write these on a flipchart, along with a list of the other sources of stress talked about within the group. Each group then brings their flipchart back to the large group. Display all the flipcharts on the wall.

Allow at least 15 minutes for discussion within the large group, after participants have had time to walk around and study each group's charts.

3. Relaxation

For centuries, people have relaxed to quiet the mind and reach a state of peace. When animals have enough to eat and they are safe, they lie down. People do not do that because humankind is the only animal that worries about the future. We fear that if we relax today, we will be in trouble tomorrow.

Herbert Benson in (Perkinson, 1998: 361) has shown that if people relax twice a day for 10 to 20 minutes, it has a major impact on their overall stress level. People who do this have fewer illnesses, they feel better, and they are healthier. Illnesses such as high blood pressure, ulcers, and headaches can go away completely with a regular relaxation programme.

Against this background, three orientating concepts regarding relaxation as a skill, follows:

- i. Learning a relaxation skill is like learning any skill – e.g. driving a car, typing, swimming – in that there are several stages you are likely to go through. You learn to walk before you learn to run.
 - *Regular practice.* Initially you should “just do it”, regular practice is crucial. Repeat what you have been shown and do not worry if there is not much change or you only enjoy some sessions.
 - *General benefits.* Although you should not expect too much too soon, after a week or two of regular practice you are likely to notice some general benefits. You may find you are sleeping a bit better, feeling a bit more relaxed or getting less irritable.
 - *Specific benefits.* As you continue to develop your relaxation skills, specific problem areas that you are particularly bothered by can start to respond.

- ii. Attention. When learning a relaxation skill it is important to get the balance right between being focused and attentive on the one hand, and relaxing and releasing on the other. Different types of relaxation techniques will have a different balance.

- iii. Applications. When learning a relaxation skill it is important to be able to apply it in various situations. More specifically, in episodes that is stressful to you.

Participants should now be ready to work through the next relaxation exercise.

Exercise 2: Relaxation exercise

- (a) Sit or lie down in a quiet place. (b) Pay attention to your breathing.
- (c) Every time you exhale, say the word, “one” over quietly to yourself. It is normal for other ideas to come, but when they do, just return to the word “one.”
- (d) Do this for 10 – 20 minutes twice a day.

You do not have to use the word “one”, you can use any other word or phrase of your choice, but it has to be the same word or phrase, repeatedly. You can get some relaxation tapes or music that you find relaxing. You can pray or meditate. The most important thing is to relax as completely as you can. If you do this, your stress level will be lower, and you will be better able to mobilize yourself to deal with stress when it occurs.

As you practice relaxation, you will learn how it feels to be relaxed, try to keep this feeling all day. When you feel stressed, stop and take two deep breaths. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. As you exhale, feel a warm wave of relaxation flow down your body. Once you have regained your state of relaxation, return to your day, and move a little slower this time. Remember, nothing is ever done too well or too slowly. You do not have to do things quickly to succeed.

When you come to something new that you think you need to do, ask yourself several important questions.

- Do I have to do this?
- Do I have to do it now?
- Is this going to make a difference in my life?

If the new stressor is not that important, perhaps you should not do it at all. Do not decide to overly stress yourself – that does not make any sense. Know your limits. Achieve a state of relaxation in the morning, and listen to your body all day long. If anything threatens your serenity, turn it over and let a Higher Power deal with it.

Exercise 3: Relaxation at home

For the next week, set aside two times a day for relaxation. Go through the exercise we practised or some other relaxation exercise. Score the level of relaxation you achieve from one, as little as possible, to 100, as much as possible. Then score your general stress level during the day the same way. Write down any comments about your stress. List the situations when you felt the most tension.

E.g. Day one: Relaxation score..... Comments:.....
 Daily stress score.....

4. Exercise

People who maintain a regular exercise programme feel less depressed and less anxious; they improve their self-concept and enhance the quality of their life. An exercise programme, while it is difficult to develop, can be fun. You get a natural high from exercise, which you do not get any other way. It feels good and it feels good all day.

A good exercise programme includes three elements: stretching, strength and cardiovascular fitness. Stretching means, you increase a muscle's range of motion until you become supple and flexible. Never stretch your muscles to the point of pain. The body will warn you well before you go too far. However, get into the habit of stretching before all exercise.

In a strength programme, you gradually lift more weight until you become stronger. Do not lift more often than every other day. The muscles need a full day of rest to repair them. Soon you can increase the load. Three sets of 10 repetitions each is a standard exercise for each muscle group. Correct technique is very important here.

Cardiovascular fitness is attained, when you exercise at a training heart rate for 20 minutes three times a week. Usually you will be increasing your exercise by 10% a week. Many forms of exercise can be beneficial for cardiovascular training. The key point is this: It must be sustained exercise for at least 20 minutes. It cannot be a stop-start exercise, such as tennis or golf. It must be something you can sustain. These are exercises such as jogging, walking, swimming, biking, and the like.

Exercise 4: Physical fitness

Participants go into small groups of four to five people. Each small group are asked to:

- (a) Outline, as clearly as possible, the costs and benefits of exercise, and
- (b) Give one example of an effective exercise programme.

When completed, each group gives feedback. A general discussion by the group as a whole follows.

5. Your lifestyle

Along with maintaining regular relaxation and exercise time, you must change other aspects of your life to improve stress management skills.

5.1 Problem-solving skills

As noted in the previous session, you need to be able to identify and respond to the problems in your life. Unsolved problems increase your stress level. Problems are a normal part of life and you need specific skills to deal with them effectively. For each problem, work through the following steps:

- Identify the problem.
- Clarify your goals. What do you want?
- Consider every alternative of action.
- Think through each alternative, eliminating one at a time, until you have the best alternative.
- Evaluate the effect of your action.
- Act on the problem

Exercise 5: Problem-solving

In small groups of four or five, participants are to solve the following problem:
A friend has been taking drugs and you are worried about his/her health.

Allow 10 minutes for this. When completed, each small group gives feedback to the whole group, followed by a general discussion of the problem solving process.

5.2 Developing pleasurable activities

Increasing pleasurable activities will elevate your mood and decrease your overall stress level.

The following exercise will thus help participants explore and identify enjoyable activities that are both constructive and healthy.

Exercise 6: Identifying pleasurable activities

Divide in to small groups of four or five. Then identify and list the things that you enjoy doing (e.g. looking at a sunrise, camping, smelling a flower, fishing, eating ice-cream, being with someone you love.) Share this with the whole group.

(Note: The more pleasurable things you do, the better you will feel.)

5.3 Social skills

What you do socially, can turn people off, or turn them on. If you do any of the following, you might be turning people off.

- Not smiling
- Failing to make eye contact
- Not talking
- Complaining
- Telling everyone your troubles
- Not responding to people
- Whining

- Being critical
- Poor grooming
- Not showing interest in people
- Ignoring people
- Having an angry look
- Nervous gestures
- Feeling sorry for yourself
- Always talking about the negative

You are turning people on if you do the following:

- Smile
- Look into people's eyes
- Express your concern
- Talk about pleasant things
- Be reinforcing
- Tell people how nice they look
- Be appreciative
- Tell people you care
- Listen
- Touch
- Invite people to do something with you
- Act interested
- Use people's name
- Talk about the positive
- Groom yourself well.

To have good social skill, you have to be assertive. You cannot be passive or aggressive. The following session will focus on this in more detail.

Session 8 - 9

Developing assertiveness skills

Developing assertiveness skills

1. Introduction

Effective communication and more specifically effective expressive skills are consistently associated with resiliency in adolescence. Skills that is also necessary to establish and maintain social and close interpersonal relationships. Still, some of these skills seem simple, but some of them can take great courage. The focus on sessions eight and nine will thus be on the development of assertiveness as important expressive (communication) and social skills for early adolescents. In other words, to focus on the development of participants' ability to stand up for their personal rights and to express their thoughts, feelings and beliefs in a direct, honest and appropriate way, without violating other people's rights. Aspects that will be covered include: (a) What is assertiveness, (b) the essence of assertiveness, (c) knowing your rights, (d) fundamental assertive skills, and (e) self-protective skills.

Table 8 provides the planned course of sessions eight and nine.

Table 8: Developing assertiveness skills

Session 8		Session 9	
09:00- 09:10 <i>(10 minutes)</i>	Introduction Exercise 1: "What I need to know about assertiveness"	09:00 –09:05 <i>(5 minutes)</i>	Recap
09:10 – 09:20 <i>(10 minutes)</i>	What is assertiveness? Exercise 2: Defining assertiveness	09:05 – 09:30 <i>(25 minutes)</i>	Fundamental assertive skills Exercise 6: The art of persistence

Session 8		Session 9	
			Exercise 7: Successful negotiation
09:20 – 09:40 (20 minutes)	Why bother to be assertive? Exercise 3: Let us pretend	09:30 – 10:05 (35 minutes)	Self-protective skills Exercise 8: Coping with “Put downs” Exercise 9: Self-criticism Exercise 10: Giving criticism to others Exercise 11: Receiving criticism
09:40 – 09:55 (15 minutes)	The essence of assertiveness Exercise 4: Walk around	10:05 –10:10 (5 minutes)	Feedback
09:55 – 10:10 (15 minutes)	Knowing your rights Exercise 5: Assertive rights		

After the introduction, as noted before, the following exercise is a good starting point to focus participants' thinking.

Exercise 1: “What I need to know about assertiveness”

Participants brainstorm the question, “What I need to know about assertiveness” for 5 – 10 minutes. Write all the answers on a blackboard or flipchart, and refer back to them during the session to meet these needs.

2. What is assertiveness?

The word assertiveness is used to describe a certain kind of behaviour. It is behaviour, which helps us to communicate clearly and confidently our *needs, wants* and *feelings* to other people without abusing in any way their human rights. It is an alternative to passive, aggressive and manipulative behaviour.

If we want to be assertive, we must:

- Decide what we want,
- decide if it is fair,
- ask clearly for it,
- not be afraid of taking risks,
- be calm and relaxed,
- express our feelings openly,
- give and take compliments easily, and
- give and take fair criticism.

We must not:

- Beat about the bush,
- go behind people's backs,
- bully,
- call people names, or
- bottle up our feelings.

The following exercise is used to explore the participants view to assertiveness.

Exercise 2: Defining assertiveness

Write the word assertive on a flipchart or blackboard and ask participants to brainstorm all the words that come into their minds. List all the words.

The social worker can then start a discussion about the results of the exercise, underlining the positive and negative words. In the course of choosing which words should be classed as positive or negative, a stimulating discussion can emerge as participants become aware of each other's opinions and prejudices.

Small groups of three or four participants will then discuss and come up with a definition of assertiveness to share with the whole group.

At first glance this exercise appears simple and straightforward, however, competence is eventually enhanced as participants discover how to adapt their existing skills and knowledge to the issues that emerge during the learning experience.

3. Why bother to be assertive?

It is important at the start of the assertiveness training sessions to be very clear about both the advantages and disadvantages of becoming more assertive. According to Lindenfield (1990: 18) most people interested in enhancing their assertiveness, hope that if they learn to be more assertive, they will get more of what they want. Unfortunately, this is not always true.

Developing assertiveness skills can help us to communicate our needs more openly and honestly but it cannot guarantee that they will be met. Assertive behaviour more often leads to compromise and negotiation rather than an outright win for one party. Often, manipulative, behind the back techniques and aggressive behaviour actually get us more of what we want in terms of material goods or power: It does so, often at great expense to our personal relationships and self-esteem. Biographies of very many powerful and successful people reveal loneliness and feelings of self-deprecation.

The assertiveness training sessions will teach you to behave in such a way so that you do not come away from situations feeling bad about yourself. You will come away with the satisfaction that you "did your best" and did not abuse the rights of others.

The good news is that adolescents who are generally assertive are confident and relaxed individuals who are happy simply to be themselves. Assertive youth are aware both of their strengths and their weaknesses. They are not afraid of taking risks and know that by doing so; they will probably make many mistakes.

If you are assertive, you will view mistakes positively and see them as an opportunity to learn and do better next time. You will have learned to gauge your successes by your own capabilities and potential rather than by continually comparing yourself with other people. Accepting your own capabilities will help you to set yourself realistic goals so that you do not continually put yourself into situations where you will feel a failure.

Being assertive also means accepting that not everyone in the world will be kind and caring towards you. You will develop the ability to spot

when you are abused or "put down" and you will know how to cope with unfair criticism and exploitation.

Finally, you will learn to use assertiveness appropriately. You will be aware that there are some situations when it is wise to take a back seat and some where it is appropriate to fight for your, and other', rights. An obvious example of when assertive behaviour might not be appropriate would be when you or others are in physical danger. Yes, certainly learning to be assertive is worth the effort. Even the process of learning the skills can be challenging and fun.

Exercise 3: Let us pretend

Each participant should think of a number of assertive people, they know. They then select one and think about that person, concentrating on the person's lifestyle and achievements.

The group then walks around the room silently being their selected person. When the social worker indicates, they should stop and introduce themselves as that person to a partner, and talk about themselves for one minute each. Their partner can then introduce them to someone else in the group.

The exercise will go on for 15 minutes.

Alternatively, you can simply find partners and talk about your selected person.

4. The essence of assertiveness

Every person at some time has to cope with a problem. Two basic instinctual responses when encountering a problem are **Flight** (passivity) and **Fight** (aggression). Man, however, has developed a third response more suited to the solving of the kind of relationship problems he has encountered through community living. This response involves the use of his more sophisticated brain and verbal skills. It is the ability to **Discuss, Argue** and **Negotiate**.

Assertiveness training aims to help us develop the third response, which is often a more appropriate and successful way of communicating with others.

There is a growing awareness in our society of the pitfalls of aggression and passivity and such behaviours are often considered socially unacceptable. Unfortunately, this does not necessarily mean that these behaviours are less frequently used but rather that they are more heavily disguised and less easy to distinguish.

How often the person who is "all talk and no action" – or the "charming" person who always manages to make us feel small and useless in their company fools us all.

Many people are confused about the different behaviours and are unassertive simply because they are afraid to be seen as passive or aggressive. Here, the need to be liked may be getting in the way of them standing up for their own rights.

The following Table distinguishes between the three types of behaviour.

Table 9: Aggressive, Passive and Assertive behaviours

	Aggressive	Passive	Assertive
<i>Non-verbal signals</i>	Shouting	Whining voice	Calm and controlled voice
	Loud voice	Clenched, wringing hands	Relaxed posture
	Pointing finger	Shuffling feet	Direct eye contact
	Folded arms	Downcast eyes	Upright
	Still posture	Stoop	
Key words and sentences – used with the appropriate non-verbal behaviour	You'd better	Maybe	I
	... If you don't	I guess	I think
	Watch out	I wonder	I feel
	Come on	Would you mind very much if...	I want
	Should	Sorry... sorry... sorry	Let's
	Bad	Excuse me, please	How can we resolve this?
	Stupid!	But	What do you think?
	You!	You know	What do you see?
		I hope you don't mind	

Exercise 4: Walk-around

The social worker tells the group to silently think of an extremely passive person they know and then to try to 'get into their shoes' and walk around the room as though they were that person. Think of how they would use their body and exaggerate the gestures and positions. The social worker then says "freeze" and asks everyone to look around and talk about what they observe, for example how people are standing, holding their hands or how they walked.

Repeat this exercise for both an aggressive and an assertive person.

5. Knowing your rights

An acceptance that we have a right to assert our needs, wants and feelings with other people is of fundamental importance. The definition of assertive behaviour as previously mentioned makes reference to basic human rights and therefore it needs to be clarified what these rights mean. According to Lindenfield (1990:29), rights are anything, which we think human beings are entitled to by virtue of their very existence.

In relationships, one person or another may also describe rights as reasonable expectations. Although each individual is ultimately responsible for his own values, the following list covers some of the most important Basic Human Rights the assertive person aims to respect for both him and others.

Assertive Rights:

- I have the right to ask for what I want (realizing that the other person has the right to say 'no').
- I have the right to have an opinion, feelings and emotions and to express them appropriately.
- I have the right to make statements which have no logical basis, and which I do not have to justify (e.g. intuitive ideas and comments).
- I have the right to make my own decisions and to cope with the consequences.
- I have the right to choose whether or not to get involved in the problems of someone else.
- I have the right not to know about something and not to understand.
- I have the right to make mistakes.
- I have the right to be successful.
- I have the right to change my mind.
- I have the right to privacy.
- I have the right to be alone and independent.
- I have the right to change my-self and be assertive.

To emphasize this point the social worker will use the following exercise:

Exercise 5: Assertive rights

Ask participants to divide into pairs and then read the list of assertive rights to one another. The person listening is responsible for verbal and/or non-verbal confirmation of each assertive right. For example: The listener can do this by, nodding or smiling enthusiastically or they can reply by saying something like this: "Yes, you have the right to make your own decisions and cope with them appropriately." After reading through the rights, participants can then spend some time sharing any difficulties they may have with them.

With this exercise, participants have the chance to give each other some positive reinforcement, which is most helpful if anyone has difficulty in accepting and owning these rights.

6. Fundamental assertive skills

6.1 Persistence

Most unassertive people take 'no' for an answer far too easily. There is a growing awareness in our society that this tendency is jeopardizing the rights of large numbers of people. For example, in recent years there has been an upsurge in consumer protection organizations and pressure groups. This is a welcome development as there will always be a need for such organizations to protect the interests of individuals and minorities in a competitive society. The danger is that we can become over-dependent on professional workers for our rights and lose the art of asserting ourselves. It is better for your self-esteem and relationships with other people if you can learn the art of persistence

for yourself. We have to learn to ignore some of the not-so-pleasant messages that may be ringing in our unconscious minds, such as:

"If you ask once more – I'll flatten you."

"You're a nagger – just like your mother."

"Don't make a scene."

The main technique that we use in assertiveness training to practise the art of persistence is called Broken Record. When a record is scratched, we hear one sentence repeatedly until we reach screaming pitch and jump up to turn it off.

Broken record is the skill of being able to repeat over and over again, in an assertive and relaxed manner, what it is you want or need, until the other person gives in or agrees to negotiate with you.

This technique is extremely useful for:

- Dealing with situations where your rights are clearly in danger of being abused.
- Coping with situations where you are likely to be diverted by clever, articulate but irrelevant arguments.
- Situations where you are likely to lose your self-confidence because you know you could be affected by "digs" and "put-downs" to your self-esteem.

The beauty of using broken record is that once you have prepared your lines, you can relax. You have nothing more to worry about because you know exactly what you are going to say, however abusive or manipulative the other person tries to be. However, as with most assertive techniques, it must be used appropriately. It is a self-

protective skill and not designed to foster deep interesting conversations and friendships with people.

Exercise 6: The art of persistence

Divide into small groups of three or four people and choose an appropriate situation in which to rehearse the skill of Broken Record. Use one of your own scenes, e.g. refusing a date from a persistent admirer.

Take turns in practising the technique, firstly repeating exactly the same sentence. Secondly, try slightly altering your words but ensure that the message is the same.

When you have mastered the technique, practise using it together with a sentence that empathizes with the other person. For example, "I can appreciate that you are in a difficult position (empathy) but I would like a refund today, please." (Broken Record)

6.2 Negotiation

The art of negotiation, like so many other assertive skills, is becoming a profession in its own right. We certainly do not need a sophisticated training in diplomacy to negotiate solutions to ordinary everyday problems, but a little tact and forethought would certainly help

- Empathize: Empathize with the other person, i.e. really try to understand what it feels like to be in his shoes. If the other person is showing any feeling, acknowledge that you are aware of it. Say, for example: "I can see this is an important issue for you" or "I can see that you are busy..."

- Ask for clarification: Make sure that you fully understand their position, their reasoning and their needs.
- Keep calm: If possible use relaxation techniques to help you prepare for a situation you know will be tricky. At the very least, take a couple of long, slow, deep breaths before you start.
- Be prepared: Do your homework thoroughly and get together any data that may support your case.
- Keep to the point: Beware of becoming side-tracked. Ensure that the other party always keeps to the point as well. Sometimes broken record is a useful technique to use to bring the discussion back to the central subject.
- Offer a compromise: Do not be stubborn and wait for the other person to "give in" first.

Exercise 7: Successful Negotiation

Divide into groups of four or five and share some personal problems, from either the past or present, which you think could be resolved by negotiation. Choose one or more of these situations and select two people to "act-out" a negotiating scene.

Remember it is important to select a situation where there is room for negotiation, and group discussion can help you do this. Emotional involvement with problems can easily blind us to their potential solutions, so it is worth sharing even the most seemingly intractable ones.

7. Self-protective skills

7.1 Coping with “Put-Downs”

“Put-down” is a term frequently used in assertiveness training. A “put-down” is a question or remark from another person, which violates one or more of your basic human rights. These are remarks and questions designed to make you feel small or manipulate you into doing or saying something you do not wish to do or say. Sometimes the other person is quite blatant in his intentions, but often they are subtly disguised and wrapped in social niceties or jokey behaviour. For example: “You're too young to understand...”

“Come on, it's only a bit of fun...”

The next Table contains examples of put down sentences, with their nasty 'hidden message', followed by a suggested assertive response.

Table 10: Asserting yourself

	Put-down sentence	Hidden message	Assertive response
Nagging	“Haven't you finished the washing up yet?”	You are useless	“No, when did you want it done?”
Prying	“I know I shouldn't really be nosey, but...”	I can easily get round you – you will tell me anything	“Well, I won't tell you if I don't want to...”
Lecturing	“We should co-operate	I am OK – you should fall	“How could we co-

	Put-down sentence	Hidden message	Assertive response
	and then there would be less tension.”	in line with me. It is your fault.	operate?”
Putting on the spot	“Are you busy on Wednesday?”	Ha! Ha! I will get you to agree to do something you do not want to do. I have you on the spot if you say you are free.	“What did you have in mind?”
Questioning choice	“Are you sure this job is the right one for you?”	You are not capable of choosing a job for yourself.	“It feels OK for me at the moment...”
Unwanted advice	“If I were you...”	I know better than you do...	“But you are not.”
Insulting labels	“That’s a typical teenager reaction...”	You are just a stereotype – not an individual.	“It is my reaction and it is up to me to judge my own behaviour.”
Amateur psychologist	“You’ll find it difficult won’t you because you are so shy...”	You are a hopeless case.	“In what ways do you think I am too shy?”

At this stage, it is important to clearly distinguish the assertive, aggressive and passive responses to these kinds of remarks and questions. When replying to put-downs it is important to remember that

you are simply aiming to: (a) protect your rights and self-esteem, (b) let the other person know you recognize the hidden message, and (c) put a quick stop to the put-down behaviour.

Exercise 8: Coping with Put-downs

Participants break into small groups and each take one or two examples of the put-down sentences previously mentioned. As a group, discuss the three possible responses to these sentences using the *aggressive*, *passive* and *assertive* responses. When finished, small groups share these with the rest of the group whilst checking results with the examples of assertive replies.

Note: Sometimes it is not possible to reply assertively to put-downs as soon as they are received. There should be no great shame in taking issue with the other person the next time you meet him (or her).

7.2 Coping with criticism

7.2.1 Self-criticism

The best and perhaps safest place to start confronting criticism is within you. If you are aware of your own faults and are either prepared to tolerate them or take active steps to correct them, criticism from others is much easier to bear and you will be more able to give fair criticism to others.

Exercise 9: Self-criticism

Everyone should write down one or two examples from their own life in the following areas: (a) Natural handicap or imperfection (e.g. nose is too large), (b) mistakes (e.g. "I don't work hard enough at school"), and (c) faults (e.g. "I am untidy" or "I don't stand up for myself").

When you have completed your list, find a partner with whom you feel happy to share it. Each person should listen in an accepting way to the faults of their partner. Remember that the other person has a right not to like his nose or his untidiness even if you find both very endearing.

7.2.2 Giving criticism to others

Here are some hints on giving helpful and constructive criticism:

- Be specific. The golden rule when giving criticism to others is to avoid generalizations. For example, it is much more useful to say: "I don't think dull colours suit you" than to say "You've got no dress sense."
- Acknowledge the positive. If you can include some genuine positive comment, do so. For example, "You have lovely hair but I do prefer your natural colour."
- Keep calm. If you have a tendency to be aggressive or get stage fright, practise some quiet relaxation techniques before entering the situation. Keep your voice level and avoid threatening gestures.

- Keep to the point. Do not be tempted to bring in all your other complaints to cloud the issue and do not allow yourself to be sidetracked.
- Focus on behaviour. Do not attack the whole person, merely their behaviour or one particular aspect of their appearance, for example, say, "You always leave the bathroom in a mess", not "You are the most untidy person I have ever known."
- Do not use labels or stereotypes. For example "You're so childish", "pig", etc.

Exercise 10: Giving criticism to others

Find a partner and criticise each other's school clothes in a lighthearted manner.

7.2.3 Receiving criticism

There are three main techniques for helping us to deal with criticism from others: i.e. negative assertion, fogging and negative enquiry.

7.2.3.1 Negative assertion

Negative assertion is calmly agreeing with the true criticism of your negative qualities. For example: "This desk is a complete and utter mess... you're hopelessly disorganized!" You can reply, "Yes it is true I am not very tidy." The rationale behind this, comes down to self-acceptance. In other words, if you are genuinely happy to accept

that you have faults, and that you are not perfect, people will be less likely to put you down.

7.2.3.2 Fogging

Fogging is a skill, which helps us to cope with manipulative criticism. This kind of criticism is eventually a put-down and designed to make you feel bad about yourself or make you do something you do not want to do. There is often an element of truth in what is said, but the critic may elaborate or exaggerate. For example: "You're late for rugby /soccer practice.... You're always late... you don't care about the team..." In all probability, the only truth in the accusation is: "You're late..." but nevertheless the onslaught succeeds in leaving you feeling extremely guilty. The technique of fogging is to calmly acknowledge that there may be some truth in what is said. You can use fogging on its own, or perhaps more usefully, use it with a sentence, which reflects your assessment of the situation. For example, in reply to the above statement you may say, "Yes, I am late this afternoon. It is possible that I am not as committed to the team as I could be."

By using the technique of fogging, you are merely aiming to stop the manipulative criticism and protect your self-esteem. You achieve this by refusing to reward the put-down behaviour. Your attacker, after all, wants you to feel hurt and upset. If he does not get what he wants, he is less likely to try again.

7.2.3.3 Negative enquiry

This is perhaps the most difficult of all the techniques to use but is very useful in improving communication, particularly in personal relationships. Negative enquiry involves you in: actively prompting criticism of your behaviour. For example: "You'll find that difficult won't you because you are so shy?" The assertive response using negative enquiry was: "In what ways do you think I am too shy?" This kind of reply will very quickly help you decide if your critic is genuinely concerned about your shyness or merely wants to put you down. The "nasty" character will probably be thrown by your response, and may just continue to put you down and refuse to be specific. For example, "Goodness, what a question. You would not really want to know.. I'm not a psychiatrist you know.." Once you have exposed your critic's real intentions you can deal with any further put-downs by fogging them and asserting your right to be judge of your own behaviour. If however the criticism is constructive, for example: "... well, I've noticed that you always wait for other people to start conversations and you never look people straight in the eye", it could be very useful feedback.

If you start by inviting criticism, from other people you obviously run a much higher risk of getting put-down or hearing superficial feedback. Neither experience will enhance your self-esteem and both are best avoided. When your confidence has improved, feedback from family and peers can be very useful especially in situations where you have trouble asserting yourself.

Exercise 11: Receiving criticism

In groups of four to five, participants practise the skills of negative assertion, fogging and negative enquiry. Each group should decide for themselves if they wish to choose real life situations or hypothetical scenes to role-play.

Participants then return to the plenary for a discussion about the problems and insights they had with the practise of these skills.

8. Final comment on assertiveness

To the majority of adolescents, assertive people often appear to be very spontaneous and direct in their approach to problems. However, this skill is often the result of very thorough preparation and rehearsal.

Assertion is thus an expression skill that adolescents can develop into behaviour, which seems natural and of the cuff, which will also enhance the quality of their communication and interpersonal relationships.

Session 10

Communication skills

Communication skills

1. Introduction

Effective communication is most consistently associated with resiliency in adolescence. In other words, a repertoire of effective communication skills enables the adolescent to withstand or surmount the risk of substance abuse. A personal attribute, that serves the added function of maintaining social relationships.

The focus of session ten will thus be on the development and/or enhancement of effective communication skills as constitutional factor of the individual adolescent. Aspects that will be covered include: (a) empathy, (b) validation, (c) "I feel" statements, (d) positivism, (e) physical proximity, (f) touch, (g) eye contact, (h) reinforcement, and (i) the practice of communication skills.

The following Table provides the planned course of session ten.

Table 11: Communication skills

Session 10	
09:00- 09:10 <i>(10 minutes)</i>	Introduction Exercise 1: "What I need to know about effective communication"
09:10 – 09:25 <i>(15 minutes)</i>	Empathy Exercise 2: Developing empathy

Session 10	
09:25 – 09:35 <i>(10 minutes)</i>	Validation Exercise 3: The skill of validation
09:35 – 09:50 <i>(15 minutes)</i>	How to use the “I feel statement” Exercise 4: “I feel” statements
09:50 – 10:00 <i>(10 minutes)</i>	Positivism, physical proximity, touch, eye contact, and reinforcement Exercise 5: Communication skills
10:00 – 10:10 <i>(10 minutes)</i>	Feedback

The final session of this programme will start with the following exercise.

Exercise 1: “What I need to know about effective communication”

Participants brainstorm the question, “What I need to know about effective communication” for 5 – 10 minutes. To meet these needs, write all the answers on a blackboard or flipchart, and refer back to them during the session.

2. Empathy

Empathy is the capacity to understand and respond to another's feelings. In other words, to put yourself in other people's shoes and to understand how they feel. An ability that will help participants be more appreciative and socially perceptive, by reflecting a caring and responsible attitude towards others.

To develop empathy:

Practice paraphrasing what the other person has said until you get the communication correct. The other person needs to be encouraged to correct your mistakes until you have the message correct. Repeat what the person said, as exactly as you can. Continue to repeat the message until the person agrees you have it right. This may take a few tries, but you will get better as you practice. Include the verbal and the nonverbal parts of the message. You may have to ask questions as you go along. Try to be genuine, not sarcastic or punitive. Act as a mirror, reflecting exactly what the other person is saying, and how they are feeling. Practice, getting the total communication correct. As time goes on, you will need to ask for clarification less, only when you are unsure of certain parts of the communication.

Exercise 2: Developing empathy

Divide into groups of three or four and spend some time evaluating each other's communication skills, discussing one or two of the following issues, in which you specifically use empathy. Choose one of these issues and select two people to "act-out" effective communication using empathy.

- (a) When I think about the future, I see myself...
- (b) I am happiest when...
- (c) Right now I am feeling...
- (d) The thing that concerns me the most is...
- (e) When I am rejected, I usually...
- (f) I feel loved when...
- (g) When I break the rules...
- (h) When I feel lonely, I usually...
- (i) I am rebellious when...
- (j) The emotion I find the most difficult to control is...
- (k) My most frequent daydreams are about...
- (l) My weakest point is...
- (m) I am afraid of...
- (n) I am the most ashamed of...

3. Validation

Others have a right to their opinion, and their opinion should always be important to you. This is an essential element in healthy communication. Others need to know that you value them and that you will try to understand them. People need to be validated often, particularly when they disagree with you. Not everything a person says is wrong. Find the areas that the two of you agree on and emphasize those areas. Always pick out the things you have in common and bring out those points for discussion.

Exercise 3: The skill of validation

Each participant should illustrate the skill of validation by writing down an example of (a) using, and (b) not using this skill. Participants should keep their notes. Two volunteers can present their examples to the group. A general discussion should follow.

4. How to use the "I feel" statement

Communication of feelings with the use of "I feel" statements is an important expressive skill, used to "make contact" with others. "I feel" statements refer specifically to what you, as a person, are thinking, feeling and experiencing.

We often avoid "I feel" statements because they make us feel vulnerable. This is true, we become more vulnerable. However, the use of "I feel" statements (more importantly) provides a means of communication that helps us to develop relationships based on honesty, and mutual understanding.

To use "I feel" statements:

Practice beginning many of your communications with "I feel." You may not know what is right or wrong in a given situation, but you always know how you feel. Start with your feelings, and then fill in what you think is creating those feelings. If you are feeling confused, you are having many feelings at the same time. Try to break the feelings down

and address each one separately. The “I feel” statement prevents you from concentrating on the other person. Communications that begin with “you” can be accusatory and punitive. Instead of pointing out what the other person is doing, concentrate on how you feel and what you think.

Exercise 4: “I feel” statement

Divide participants into small groups of four or five. Each group should elect a facilitator/recorder who will take notes and give feedback to the main group. The task for each group is to portray any example of effective communication using: “I feel” statements. Hereafter, one small group have time for their portrayal. Open discussion will be encouraged to help participants understand the process and come to some consensus about “I feel” statements as an important communication- and necessary social skill.

5. Be positive

Always try to find something positive to say to the other person. Even when you are disagreeing, you need to show them that you are going to be reinforcing. This shows the other person that you respect them and care about them. Be genuine in your compliments; do not say something that is not true. Continue to be positive throughout your communications with others. Being positive is contagious: The more you look at the bright side of things, the better things actually become. A positive attitude can go a long way in improving communications skills. People like being around someone who is positive. It gives them a lift, and they will want to be around you again.

6. How to use physical proximity

One of the most important elements in whether a person will like you or not is physical proximity. People that you are around more often are more likely to be attracted to you. When you are talking with someone, stand or sit a comfortable distance from them. This can be little more than an arm's length apart, so you must be up on the social norms. Do not have a piece of furniture or something else between you as you communicate: this increases interpersonal distance. Be conscious of how the other person is feeling. If they seem uncomfortable, back up a little.

7. How to use touch

Touch is a very powerful communication tool. It is hard to act angry with someone you are touching. Touch increases intimacy and decreases fear. It shows the other person that you value them and the relationship. You can often touch someone during a conversation. Try to find that opportunity and take it. Even a simple touch on the arm is a powerful message that says, I care.

7. How to use eye contact

Good communication requires good eye contact. If you do not look at the other person, you will miss a good deal of what they are saying. Eye contact is a lot like touch – it shows the person that you are

interested. It also shows them that they are important enough to warrant your full attention.

8. Be reinforcing

Compliment the other person. Say something nice. Tell them how much you appreciate them. Try to be patient and kind. Give the person your full attention. Try to understand his point of view. Dress appropriately and take good care of your appearance and personal hygiene. All of this makes you a reinforcing person.

9. How to practice communication skills

Exercise 5: Communication skills

Participants sit in a circle and then choose two persons they feel they know least. These small groups then have to establish the following skills, i.e.

- *Positivism,*
- *Physical proximity,*
- *Touch,*
- *Eye contact and reinforcement* through practical examples.

A group discussion follows about possible problems in the establishment of these skills.

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