

## SELF-ESTEEM (Pages 1-5) ASSERTIVENESS SKILLS (Pages 6-10)

### Contrast the Low Self-Esteem Experience ...

- I form a negative belief in myself that I am not an okay human being.
- I begin to feel sensations of coldness, heaviness, and tension in my body.
- I have devaluing thoughts about myself e.g. I am unlovable, I am stupid etc.
- I begin to lose self-confidence and feel pessimistic.
- I form the belief that it is unlikely that the world will ever be able to meet my needs or give me happiness.
- I begin to lose trust in other people.
- I stop bothering to try to get my needs met and/or to achieve success.
- I start to believe that I am much less happy and successful than the other people around me.
- I allow other people who I perceive as more powerful to take advantage of me.
- I begin to silently resent other people who I perceive as more successful or more powerful.
- I judge myself as a 'not okay' person for having such negative thoughts about others.
- I begin to behave in ways that are self-destructive e.g. sacrificing myself to others, not being able to say no.
- I look in the mirror and see the results of continually abusing myself and taken advantage of by others.
- I reinforce my belief that I am not an okay human being.
- I begin the low self-esteem cycle all over again ...

### With the High Self-Esteem Experience ...

- I form the belief (consciously or unconsciously) that I am an okay person.
- I begin to feel pleasant sensations in my body e.g. warmth, relaxation, liveliness.
- In my mind, I appreciate my value e.g. I am strong, I am clever, I am resourceful.
- I form positive judgements and beliefs about myself and my potential e.g. I deserve to be happy, I deserve to be liked and loved by others, I deserve to have my needs met.
- I feel increased confidence and optimism.
- I form the belief that the world can meet my needs and wants and that it is likely to do so.
- I feel livelier and my energy levels rise.
- My mind becomes livelier and starts to fill with ideas about what I would like to do and achieve.
- I feel a sense of pride, satisfaction, and happiness as I can express my needs and wants, and some are met.
- I form the belief that I can make myself happy and successful in whatever I choose to do.
- My mind works to find ways to overcome challenges on my path to success and happiness.
- I feel energised and ready to meet challenges.
- I judge my actions to be successful, even if things do not go entirely to plan, I always learn something.
- I begin the whole high self-esteem cycle again ... and again ... and again ...

### Some common experiences that interrupt or delay the development of High self-esteem

Negative experiences during childhood and adolescence e.g. loneliness, isolation; systematic punishment, neglect and/or abuse; absence of good things such as praise, affection, warmth, interest; feeling like the "odd one out" at home or at school; failing or struggling to meet very high standards set by parents, teachers, peer group or self; being subjected to or blamed for other people's stress or distress; belonging to a family or social group which is a focus for prejudice.

Later negative experiences – e.g. working in a corporate and/or high-stress environment; workplace intimidation or bullying; being exposed to unrelenting demands from others; other abusive relationships; social inequality; exposure to traumatic events; ongoing loneliness, isolation.

### Questions to help you identify positive things about yourself

- What do you like about yourself, however small or fleetingly?
- What skills have you acquired?
- What do other people value in you?
- What qualities or actions that you value in other people do you have too?
- What aspects of yourself would you appreciate if they were aspects of another person?
- What small positive things about yourself are you discounting/ignoring or overlooking?
- What have you done in your life that you have been pleased with, however small?
- What challenges have you faced or are facing?
- What gifts or talents do you have, however modest you might think them to be?
- What are those bad things or qualities that you do not possess?
- How might another person who cares about you describe you?

### Valuing yourself – ‘self-statements’ to remember

- It is okay to want or need something from someone else.
- Someone saying ‘no’ to my request does not mean I should not have asked.
- There will be times when I do not get what I want or need. I can cope with this.
- I can be understanding and respectful of another person and still ask them for what I want or need.
- There is no law that says that other people’s opinions or feelings or needs are more valid or deserving than mine.
- I may want to please people that I care about, but I am on the list of people for me to please too. I do not have to please others all the time, I do have to please myself at least some of the time.
- I do not exist just for the convenience of others, whether colleagues, bosses, family, or friends – I am an important person in this world too.
- If I say ‘no’ to someone else, it does not mean that I do not like them, and they will probably understand that too.
- I am not obliged to say ‘yes’ to someone just because they ask me to do something or ask for a favour.
- The fact that I say ‘no’ to someone does not make me a ‘bad’ person.
- If I say ‘no’ to someone and they get angry, it does not mean that I should have said yes to them, it just means they do not know how to deal with their emotions in an adult way.
- I can still feel good about myself, even though someone else may be annoyed with me.
- I can ask others for what I want or need, even when it may inconvenience them.

### ASSERTIVENESS

Being assertive is a balance of getting your own needs met and at the same time acknowledging that others have needs too and sometimes you may need to compromise, or sometimes you may need to put yourself and your needs first and at other times you may choose to prioritise the other person’s needs over your own. The key is being able to be flexible and not always doing one thing or the other. Being assertive is also a balance between being passive (not asserting your needs and wants enough) and being aggressive (asserting your needs and wants too forcefully).

## Saying 'no'

Some people find it difficult to say 'no'. Others can only say 'no' indirectly, softening the blow by shifting the blame/responsibility onto others, or by giving excuses and apologising profusely. The inability to say 'no' means that you will lack control over your life and will have to cope with the consequent increasing levels of stress, worry and low self-esteem and a sense of being 'out-of-control'. Saying 'no' directly and openly gives a feeling of mastery and greater control, which significantly boosts self-esteem.

## Common myths about saying 'no'

- Saying 'no' is callous, uncaring, mean, and selfish.
- Saying 'no' directly is rude and aggressive, too abrupt, and blunt.
- Saying 'no' will hurt and upset others, making them feel rejected.
- Saying 'no' over trivial things shows small-mindedness or pettiness.

## Seven points to remember

1. When you say 'no' you are refusing a request, you are not rejecting the person, just the request. That is your right.
2. When saying 'no', accept full responsibility for doing so. For example, do not make excuses and blame someone else but start your statements with "I can't or don't want to because ...".
3. No. The word 'no' is a complete sentence all by itself, you do not need to add anything. However, sometimes choosing to provide a concise explanation for the benefit of the other person will help them understand better and feel more supported and valued in your relationship. Be careful not to over-apologise or give elaborate excuses because these behaviours will be for your benefit to help you feel less anxious and not be so helpful for the other person. If someone asks you to do something you do not want to do, saying no is your right.
4. When learning to be assertive, you will overestimate the difficulty the other person will have in accepting your refusal or request. Most people fully understand that everyone has the right to say 'no' to requests or to ask for things. Those people who do not accept your right to say 'no' or ask for things will likely have their own problems with assertiveness/aggression – let it be their problem, not yours. Very often by expressing your opinions and feelings openly and honestly to someone you set a good example to others for how to express themselves more openly and honestly too.
5. If you wanted to say 'no' but end up saying 'yes', this will cause you stress that may manifest as a physical symptom such as anxiety or headaches and it will also negatively impact your confidence and self-esteem.
6. Acknowledge your feelings when saying 'no', a simple statement like, "I feel guilty" or "I find this difficult", allows you to express your feelings honestly and helps the other person understand your point of view, but you don't have to share how you feel, it can be your gift to give or withhold.
7. If you have said 'no' but the other person persists in asking and does not take 'no' for an answer, use the 'broken record' technique (see below). This involves just repeating the same assertive statement each time they try to persuade you. Repeating the same statement, as a politician would, regardless of how the other person may try to steer the conversation in another direction, will stop you from getting drawn into justifying yourself. It is your right to say 'no' without giving any explanation or justification. You can choose to give a brief reason, but you do not ever have to give it.

## Six Assertiveness Skills

1. **Be Super Specific** – identify exactly what you want and/or exactly how you feel and say so specifically and directly. Avoid unnecessary padding and keep your statement simple and brief. This skill will help you to be clearer in how you communicate. Sometimes, when learning to be assertive, it can help to write down your ‘assertiveness’ statements so you can take a quick look to remind yourself of what you want to say when you are feeling under pressure.
2. **Broken Record** – this skill involves preparing what you are going to say and repeating the same statement exactly and as often as necessary, in a calm, relaxed manner. Stick to your precise statement to stop you from getting hooked into a conversation about anything else which would distract you from the message you want to get across. When you use this technique, you can relax completely because you know what you are going to say and you can maintain a steady comment, avoiding the other person’s attempts to manipulate you or persuade you using irrelevant logic or argumentative baits/hooks to get you off message.
3. **Workable compromise** –when there is a conflict between your needs or wishes, and those of someone else, assertiveness is not about winning. You may need to negotiate from an equal position with the other person and find a compromise which takes both parties’ needs into consideration. Compromising and finding a solution to a demanding situation that is as fair as possible to all should build your self-esteem and self-respect.
4. **Self-disclosure** – this skill allows you to disclose your feelings with a simple statement, for example, “I feel nervous” or “I feel guilty”. The immediate effect is to reduce your anxiety, enabling you to relax and take charge of yourself and your feelings. When you share how you feel with someone else, you are making a non-disputable assertive statement. Only you know how you feel and no one else has the right to tell you how you should or should not feel or to pass judgement on whether you are right or wrong to feel the way you do. There is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’.
5. **Negative assertion** – this skill involves calmly agreeing with someone else’s constructive criticism of your flaws and accepting that you have flaws (every human has flaws) e.g. “You are late again. I get so fed up waiting for you!” Saying something like, “Yes, it’s true, I’m often late and I’m sorry I kept you waiting. I will try to be on time in future.” The key to using negative assertion is, of course, having the self-confidence to do so, and not feeling threatened and becoming defensive. Having the confidence to accept your own flaws and being willing to explore making certain changes in your behaviour if you feel that would be appropriate is assertiveness-in-action. By agreeing with and accepting criticism, if it is appropriate and constructively given, you will be able to learn and not feel rejected by the criticism.
6. **Negative inquiry** – this skill involves actively questioning criticism of you, to ascertain whether it is constructive and/or appropriate, or to expose it as manipulative and/or hurtful. For example, if someone said to you “You are too passive!”, you would inquire: “In what ways do you think I’m too passive?” If the criticism is constructive, the person will be able to answer with concrete examples that you can use constructively and the general communication in the relationship will be improved. If the person cannot produce specific examples, the criticism cannot be considered constructive or appropriate.

PASSIVE	ASSERTIVE	AGGRESSIVE
<p><b>Long rambling statements. Fill-in words:</b> 'err', 'sort of' etc</p> <p><b>Frequent justifications:</b> 'I wouldn't normally say anything, only ...'</p> <p><b>Apologies:</b> 'I am terribly sorry to bother you ...'</p> <p><b>Unacknowledged choices:</b> 'I should', 'I ought', 'I must', 'I have to'.</p> <p><b>Qualifiers:</b> 'It's only my opinion ...', 'I might be wrong ...'</p> <p><b>Self-dismissal:</b> 'It's not important', 'It doesn't matter'.</p> <p><b>Self-putdowns:</b> 'I am useless ... hopeless', 'you know me ...'</p>	<p><b>"I" statements that are brief, clear and to the point:</b> 'I like ...', 'I feel ...', 'I think ...', 'I prefer ...'</p> <p><b>Distinction between fact and opinion:</b> 'My experience is different'.</p> <p><b>Suggestions without 'should', 'ought' etc:</b> 'How about ...', 'Would you like me to ...'.</p> <p><b>Constructive criticism without blame:</b> 'I feel irritated when you interrupt me.'</p> <p><b>Seeking other's views:</b> 'What do you think?'</p> <p><b>Willingness to explore other solutions:</b> 'How can we get around this problem?'</p>	<p><b>Boastfulness:</b> 'I don't have problems like you.'</p> <p><b>Opinion expressed as fact:</b> 'That's a useless way to do it.'</p> <p><b>Threatening questions:</b> 'Haven't you finished yet?'</p> <p><b>Threatening requests:</b> 'You'd better do that', 'I want that done, or else.'</p> <p><b>Heavy handed advice:</b> 'You should ...', 'You ought to ...', 'You must ...'</p> <p><b>Blame:</b> 'You made a mess of that.', 'You made me do that.'</p> <p><b>Sarcasm:</b> 'I don't suppose you managed to ...', 'Are you joking?'</p>

## BILL OF RIGHTS

Each person, you, and other people, have the following rights:

1. I have the right to express my feelings, opinions, and beliefs.
2. I have the right to say 'yes' and 'no' as I see fit.
3. I have the right to change my mind.
4. I have the right to say, 'I don't understand'.
5. I have the right to be exactly as I am, and I do not need anyone's approval.
6. I have the right simply to be myself without having to do things to benefit others.
7. I have the right to decline responsibility for other people and their problems.
8. I have the right to make reasonable requests of others.
9. I have the right to set my own goals and priorities.
10. I have the right to be listened to and taken seriously.
11. I have the right to make mistakes and feel comfortable about admitting to them.
12. I have the right to be illogical in making decisions.
13. I have the right to say, 'I don't care'.
14. I have the right to feel exactly the way I do, be that miserable or cheerful.
15. I have the right to stick up for myself.
16. I have the right to enjoy myself and know I am as good as anyone else on this planet.

## HOW TO IMPROVE ASSERTIVENESS SKILLS AND DEVELOP A POSITIVE SELF IMAGE

The way to build self-esteem and a positive self-image is to DO things that are positive, active, and assertive. The doing comes first, and then the feelings will follow. Here are some suggestions of what you can do to start your positive self-image journey:



### Write down two positive things a day

Write down two positive things about yourself everyday for six weeks. This can be general praise, e.g. "I'm clever" or concrete things, e.g. "I cleaned the bathroom" or "I gave up my seat for someone on the bus" or "I changed the light bulb". They can be big or small, from the past, present, or future. It does not have to be one of the best things you have ever done, merely that you can evaluate it as positive. It could be the way you look, how you speak, how you interacted with someone or something you enjoyed, e.g. "That book/TV programme/film/sports match was good".

Start moving towards positive actions that have some degree of assertiveness, e.g. "I returned that faulty gizmo to the shop" or "I expressed my views/feelings". Do not give yourself half-hearted compliments, e.g. "Well, I did finish it, but I had to", be generous. Praise yourself and praise yourself in writing for six weeks!



### Ignore negative self-talk and negative emotions

Use thought stopping on self-critical, anxiety provoking and depressive thinking. The first instant you sense a self-critical, negative or anxiety provoking thought KILL IT! Say "STOP" to yourself (or aloud if you are alone or not embarrassed) and banish that destructive thought before it has chance to take root. Replace negative thoughts with self-praise or imagine a 'pleasurable scene' – this can be any memory you have of you feeling good and happy or it can be an imaginary scene of something you would love to do in the future. If you feel low or anxious, allow the thoughts to be there but changing how you think and getting busy with your day instead of dwelling on negative feelings, will help overcome them. Sometimes it helps to get a professional to guide you through ways of overcoming negative thoughts and feelings.



### Be assertive

Being assertive improves your confidence, self-esteem, and self-image by producing positive emotions and making you feel capable, stronger, and more in control. It also reduces inhibitions and anxiety. Being assertive and taking control of your life and the situations you find yourself in means you will feel less controlled by outside forces.

Assertiveness is the ability and the emotional freedom to express your opinions, feelings and needs openly, with confidence and strength. Assertiveness is standing up for yourself, and not letting others take advantage of you. Assertiveness shares some qualities with aggressiveness but unlike aggressiveness, you are not out to hurt, manipulate or take advantage of anyone. The quote from Talmud says, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?" and the less quoted second half of it says, "But if I am only for myself, what am I?" This ties in with the idea of being selfish and how most people assume that being selfish is a negative thing but in fact, we MUST be selfish some of the time to survive and thrive. If we always do only what everyone else wants to do and never do anything 'selfish' like look after our own needs or do things for ourselves for fear of upsetting others, that is a fast-track to low self-esteem, low confidence, anxiety, and depression.

Assertiveness is a behaviour and so it can be learned. Assertiveness is not something internal, it requires acting on the world in some way. As you practice being assertive, step by step, you will become stronger, more confident, less anxious and your self-image will all improve in a direct step-by-step parallel. So, begin in small ways with easier things first. For example, ask someone you know for a small favour, or express an opinion about the weather ("I think it's warm today"). As ordinary as these things may seem, it is, for some, an essential first trial step. The point is to make it the tasks easy-enough to start with so that you know you will succeed. It is no accident that being assertive not only improves your self-worth and self-esteem, but it also improves how others see you too. If you are assertive, instead of timid or aggressive,

if you are self-confident, instead of wishy-washy, people will tend to respond to you more positively. Whereas if you are passive and only try to please other people and are not assertive, people are more likely to take advantage of you or not value you, leading your confidence and self-esteem to diminish further.

Improving your self-esteem and self-image requires you to behave as if you have self-esteem and confidence and this will then lead to you thinking and feeling more positively about yourself. The negative images you have of yourself may be strong or weak. In either case, they will not be changed by just deciding to change them. Improving your confidence, self-esteem and creating a positive self-image requires you to do practical behavioural exercises and repeatedly practice them until they become 'second nature'. This is how you relearn on an emotional level.



### Assertive assignments

These exercises are basic exercises, like the basic exercise you would do when learning any new skill, e.g. tennis, typing, foreign language. If you practice them regularly and do not give up, they will increase your comfort zone, develop new emotional and psychological 'muscles', reduce your anxiety and help you develop confidence, self-esteem and improve your self-image.



1. Receiving and giving compliments (for 3 weeks or until it is easy). Accept all compliments without downgrading yourself. E.g. Instead of replying "Oh, it's only a cheap dress/shirt", say "I'm glad you like it". Or instead of replying "Anybody could have done it", say "I'm happy you thought it was good". Start looking around your environment and notice things and people you can compliment. Giving someone a compliment is an expressive thing to do, and it helps you bring yourself out of a depressed, non-active state. Keep a written record of each compliment you give and receive.



2. Opinions (for 3 weeks or until it is easy). Express two opinions a day. Start with non-threatening subjects and express them to non-threatening people (you could practice on yourself in the mirror or voice your opinion to a teddy or pet), gradually increasing the degree of controversy of the subjects and by degrees expressing yourself to more threatening people. Your opinions can be positive or negative, as long as they are yours. You do not have to say how things make you feel, just what you think. E.g. to your partner "I think we should do [insert thing to do] next time we go out", or to a colleague "I think it is too cold in here, let's turn the heating up", or to family member "I thought that programme was great". Keep a written record of each opinion you express.



3. Use the word "I" (for one week or until it is easy). Begin five or more sentences a day with the word "I". E.g. instead of saying "It's very hot, let's open a window", say "I am feeling hot, I am going to open a window".



4. Feeling your feelings (for three weeks). Eight times throughout the day, stop and check out the feeling that you have at that moment. Every time you have a feeling such as feeling glad, excited, sad, happy, calm etc, write it down. Use a feelings wheel to help you discriminate between different feelings (see end of this document). This will help you become familiar with how you are feeling from moment to moment, which will help you with the next exercise.



5. Expressing feelings (from now on). When you feel comfortable writing down feelings, express one or two of your feelings a day to one or two people. Begin with easy feelings with people you know well. E.g. "I'm really happy you called, it's nice to hear your voice", or "I feel a bit uncomfortable with all these people around". Work up to stronger feelings with people who you find it difficult to express your feelings to. E.g. "I feel scared when you say things like that", or "I feel guilty and there's no reason I should feel guilty", or "I think you've done a fantastic job with the decorating". Always start off with easier feelings and easier people to express them to and work up to more difficult feelings to more challenging people.



6. Modelling. Get an image in your mind of someone you think of as very self-confident, that you look up to and like a lot, this can be someone you know, or it can be someone in the public eye who you would aspire to be like. Keep that individual in mind and try to act confidently and assertively in the way they act or how you imagine they might act. Think of and use the words they might use, mirror the tone of voice, eye contact, posture, and self-confidence that they exude, copy it so that you will exude it yourself.



7. Say no (twice a week). If you never or rarely say “no” practice saying “no” at least twice a week when someone asks you to do something you do not want to do. If it makes you feel tense or anxious, begin by just thinking about saying “no”. In either case, write down on a card all the times you think or say “no”. Remember, no is a complete sentence and does not need any further explanation. No.



8. Ask for a favour (once a week). If you are not used to asking for a favour from others, start practicing and ask. Begin with a small favour from someone you know well, before asking for bigger favours. Being able to ask for what you want so you can get your needs met is vital for self-esteem, confidence, and a positive self-image. You deserve to be treated considerately but to earn consideration you must ask for it.



9. Buy something from a shop and return it – to get you used to asking for and getting your own way. You can start by buying something online and returning it and then graduate to buying something from a real shop and returning it and asking for a refund in-person.



10. Ask for specific things from services – E.g. go to a restaurant/cafe and insist, firmly but politely, on a quiet table; or ask a cab driver to drive more slowly or more quickly, or ask the bus driver to let you know when it is your stop.



11. Teach someone how to do something, e.g. read, dance, swim, exercise, maths, drawing, gardening, whatever skill you can share. Assuming you are not already a teacher of some kind, this is one of the best exercises as it gives you the emotional reward that comes with doing something worthwhile and giving something to someone else. There is the extra bonus of realising you have something to give. If you cannot think of a skill that you currently have, join a class yourself to learn something new, see 12 below.



12. Learn something new – the world is full of things to learn, and learning is more than a distraction. It can give you new skills, new purpose and it builds confidence, self-esteem and will help you see yourself more positively. It can introduce you to a whole new realm of possibilities in yourself and new people. Start off with a short course and browse through local adult education or college prospectuses to see what grabs your interest. If you struggle to find something that interests you or you cannot make your mind up, pick anything, the important thing is to open yourself up to learning, to get out there ‘doing it’ and you cannot do that by staying home.



14. Rehearse first then try it out. Act out the following situations with a friend or by yourself and then try out in real situations:

- a) You are in a queue, and someone pushes in in front of you. Ask him/her to go to the back of the queue.
- b) You are in a restaurant and the steak is overdone, ask the waiter, quietly but firmly, to take it back.
- c) Someone asks you not to park outside their house, tell the person that it is a public highway not their private property, there are no double yellow lines, and you are entitled to park there.





15. Be self-indulgent. This is a way of giving yourself positive reinforcement and rewards which will boost your confidence and self-esteem. There are a few suggestions below, but you may need to think of ones that suit you better if the ones below are not to your tastes. Being good to yourself, being completely 'selfish' from time-to-time is not a luxury, it is a necessity to survive and thrive in life. Personally pleasurable activities **MUST** be included in your daily routine if you are to stand any chance



a. Stay in bed for some extra time in the mornings.



b. Enjoy the sensation of moisturising your face/hands/body.



c. Do something to improve your home environment, like decorate or find a new plant or ornament that you really like the look of.



d. Treats to eat – every now and then, prepare or buy yourself something to eat that is a real treat, e.g. fancy chocolates, take-away pizza, home-made cookies etc and eat very slowly, savouring every mouthful.



e. Be like a cat for 10 minutes each day. Notice or recall how cats seek pleasure, they seek the most comfortable and cosy place in the room, they stretch and curl up and purr with contentment when being petted.



f. Once a month spend an entire day where you do only exactly what you want to do and nothing else! E.g. a pamper day, a day hiking with a picnic, a duvet-day with Netflix and popcorn!



g. Exercise – go to the gym or take an exercise, dance, or yoga class, or go for a run/brisk walk, or do sit-ups and stretches at home. There are lots of books available to assist you with ideas. Exercise makes your body stronger and your mind functions better after exercise too.

