

PEACE POWER TOOLS

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Assertiveness Skills Education

Summary:

Assertiveness is a skill that involves speaking and acting with power while maintaining respect for others. Instead of passively giving up power or aggressively demanding it, assertiveness enables youth to positively and authentically influence others. This skill is particularly helpful when youth are faced with situations of potential conflict. Similar to other social skills, assertiveness is best learned through modeling and practice.

Resources Needed:

- None

Implementation Steps:

- Work with a small group to identify and describe each skill to be practiced (i.e. using declaration statements such as "I" statements, admitting mistakes, making honest statements). Important assertive skills include the following:
 - Making "I" statements ("I think ...", "I want ...")
 - Expressing opinions ("I believe ...")
 - Saying "No" firmly but respectfully
 - Asking for what one wants
 - Initiating conversations
 - Expressing positive feelings
 - Expressing appreciation
 - Stating one's strengths and abilities ("I can ...")
 - Making statements that express one's identity, culture, sexual orientation, etc. when one chooses to do so
- Working with one skill at a time, discuss situations where and when each skill might be useful.
- Giving attention to word choice, tone of voice and body language, model/demonstrate how the skill would be used.
- Have youth role-play common situations from their lives in which skills may be useful. Here, it is best to have youth develop most of the scenarios so that they seem as real as possible. It is often useful to role-play what aggressive and passive responses might look like as well, and to contrast them with an appropriately assertive response.
- Working together as a group, develop better and better responses to situations of conflict (high risk, provocative, anxiety-provoking), while establishing a supportive peer culture. Where appropriate, discussion should include possible risks (e.g., situations of possible dating violence).
- Reflect and discuss in detail how assertiveness skills may be applied to daily life situations, emphasizing that participants may choose to use these skills, or not.
- Research shows that Blacks and females, in particular, may express assertion differently than non-black groups and males. Research shows that this is related to differences in how ethnic groups and boys and girls are socialized to understand and express rights of expression and appropriateness. For example, some research shows that among Black males, behavior that may appear to others as aggressive may rather represent a sense of achievement. These differences should be taken into account in skills training. Overall, modeling and reinforcement from important segments of the cultural community may be necessary to help modify expectations among cultural groups and genders.

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Variations:

- ***Life Skills Training*** (LST), is a manualized and highly effective prevention program that has shown utility for building social skills among middle or junior high school youth. LST is comprised of three components: Personal Self-Management Skills, Social Skills, and Drug Related Information Skills. The 2nd component, Social Skills, was designed to enhance interpersonal skills among youth, such as overcoming shyness, how to give and receive compliments, initiating social interactions, and dating relationship and assertiveness skills. LST is one of the most thoroughly evaluation evidenced-based programs available for middle and junior high school students from a variety of geographic areas, social, economic, and racial-ethnic backgrounds. Youth are taught competency skills in the areas of decision-making, interpersonal communication, assertiveness, and anger/anxiety coping.
 - LST is implemented in 45 minute segments over 15 class periods. The most important intervention method is skills training and the material is most effectively taught through facilitated group discussion and skills training exercises.
 - Trainers must first participate in a one- or two-day training that consists of training and practice using the LST program.
 - For detailed information about the LST prevention program contact National Health Promotion Associates at: 711 Westchester Avenue, White Plains, NY 10604; 800-293-4969 or visit the LST website: <http://www.lifeskillstraining.com/>
- Assertiveness training can also be conducted with individuals, although of course the peer consultation component is not present under those conditions. For example, concerned others (usually family members) may find it valuable to practice how they will ask someone who is abusing substances to take action to address the problem. (The CRAFT program is currently the strongest evidence-based approach for such situations; see: <http://casaa.unm.edu/craftinfo.html>)

Rationale and Evidence Base:

There is strong evidence that learning to be assertive increases self-esteem, perceived self-control, and interpersonal competence, while decreasing fear and anxiety. In a study conducted with multi-ethnic youth, social competence was found to have a direct protective relationship with substance use—youth who were more assertive, socially confident and had better communication skills reported less smoking and alcohol use.

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