**Self-Advocacy Activity: Assertiveness Transcript**

**Introduction:** Welcome to our activity on Assertiveness Training. Every day, we’re in situations where being assertive can help us. Maybe we want to ask someone to join us on a hike, approach a colleague with a question, or ace a college interview. Assertiveness is a healthy way of communicating these needs and is a core communication skill. We know that assertiveness is expressing yourself effectively and standing up for your point of view, while also respecting the rights and beliefs of others. Because assertiveness is based on mutual respect, it’s a useful and diplomatic communication style.

**What is Assertiveness?** You might be asking yourself, what is assertiveness? Assertiveness is a method of communication that allows us to interact with others confidently and respectfully. It involves acknowledging both positive and negative feelings and appropriately expressing those feelings to others. Assertive communication can help students accomplish their dreams and goals. As students engage in assertive communication, they are demonstrating respect for themselves and other people.

**Practicing Assertiveness:** Some people seem to be naturally assertive, while others find it harder to communicate their needs effectively. However, students who are naturally assertive in some settings might struggle in other environments.  With practice, everyone can improve their assertiveness skills. As young adults move through life, practicing assertiveness becomes more important.  This is especially true as they work through a complicated situation and develop their own identity.  In this lesson, we’ll look at the four steps of assertiveness training, as well as explore the benefits of assertive communication.

**Assertiveness Training Steps:**

[B-Roll video footage begins playing. Video cuts to a young women and male communicating in sign language. Video cuts to two young men completing a writing assignment. Video cuts to a classroom of students with students raising their hands in class. Video cuts to a small group of students learning how to use a copy machine. Video cuts to a small group of students putting icing on cupcakes. Video cuts to a young woman speaking to an elected official at disability day on the hill. Video cuts to a small group of students communicating in a classroom. Video cuts to a student presenting a small group of students and elected official in a conference room at Disability Day on the Hill.]

Let’s take a minute to explore the steps of engaging in assertive communication.  The first step is for the student to **know what they want.** For example, students should think about the outcome they desire before a meeting or a meaningful conversation. They might find it beneficial to write their thoughts down. This can help ensure they stay focused and reduce stress levels. The second step focuses on the student **asking questions.** The student should ask clarifying questions before they react in a negative or defensive manner.  They need to consider the other person’s perspective. By asking questions, the student can open the door to possibilities they might not have previously considered. Step three is for the student to **assume there is a solution to any problem or disagreement.** This step encourages students to be flexible and open to listening to other’s ideas and opinions.  When people are curious about what else is possible, ideas and communication can start to flow. Lastly, the students need to remember, “No” is an acceptable response. When “no” is the right answer, individuals don’t have to justify their response or feel the need to apologize.

**Examples and Non-Examples:** Another way for a student to practice and learn about assertive communication is to spend time discussing different communication styles. Let’s take a look at a few discussion topics of assertive communication and the alternative, passive, and aggressive communication.

* Assertiveness IS sharing your opinions confidently. It’s NOT passively keeping an opinion to yourself, or aggressively imposing your views on others.
* Assertiveness IS telling others what you need and want. It’s NOT quietly letting others make decisions for you, or aggressively demanding what you need or want.
* Assertiveness IS self-advocating for personal rights. It’s NOT passively allowing others to infringe on your rights, or aggressively infringing on the rights of others.

**Effects of Assertive Communication:** Why is learning to be assertive important for all students? Individuals who speak assertively send the message that they believe in themselves.  They are not too pushy or too timid.  Assertive individuals communicate in a way that respects other people’s needs as well as their own.  They think positively and know that their ideas and feelings matter. They tend to be better at working out conflicts and disagreements.  They’re confident individuals. They understand that people who respect others will, in-turn, be respected back.

**Improving Assertiveness Skills:** How do you assist students in acquiring or improving their assertiveness skills? Begin by having the students think about their communication style. For example, how can students evaluate past experiences and  reflect on their communication style? Do they feel they communicate their needs effectively, or do they need practice in expressing their wants and needs? Do they need to be less passive, or less aggressive, as they communicate in everyday situations? Have the student determine if they want to focus on being less passive, less aggressive, or need to build on their assertive style. Some students will need more practice than others, but everyone can improve their assertive communication skills.

**Non-Verbal Behaviors:** How can students gain practice in being assertive? One activity is to have student practice identifying non-verbal behaviors. For example, have a student model nonverbal communication by using body language that is assertive, passive, or aggressive. Examples of assertive body language might include standing up straight, standing an appropriate distance from the listener, and maintaining eye contact. Passive body language might include slumping shoulders, standing too far from the listener, and avoiding eye contact. Aggressive nonverbal communication body language consists of clenched fists, standing too close to the listener, and angry facial expressions. Once the non-verbal communication style is observed and identified, take the activity one step further by having the students brainstorm how to change the body language so that it’s assertive.

**Role-Playing:** Engaging in assertive behavior will not eliminate the challenges we face daily. Instead, assertiveness allows us to meet challenges with confidence and find a resolution. Replacing negative actions and thoughts with positive ones is an important aspect of assertiveness. Role-play is an effective strategy that allows students to practice assertive communication in the school setting. It will enable students to communicate what they think, feel, want, need, and prefer.  For example, students can practice using ‘I’ statements, like—I’d prefer…, I think…, or I feel.  Another role-play activity involves practicing using assertive language in conflict situations. This might include students practicing delivering a refusal such as “No thank you, I am not interested in carpooling,” or requesting behavior change such as “I prefer to take my break outside.”

**Practicing Assertive Behaviors**

[Video playing of Leigh Ellis – Transitional Case Manager]

[Text on screen reads: Practicing Assertiveness]

“Well we work on self-advocacy and what accommodations they need to be successful in the workplace and try to practice and role-play about when to speak up in certain situations happen or maybe things that they are not comfortable with. We make sure that we work with all of our students that are going out for work-based learning and community-based instruction, so we set aside a special time for instructors to work with them specifically on their workplace readiness skills.”

[Text on screen reads: Teaching Assertiveness Supports Skills for Problem Solving]

“The speech therapist and myself have a social skills or work readiness class on Fridays where we try to role-play different scenarios that are going to come up with at work. Maybe you have a problem with a customer or maybe you haven’t done something right; maybe you saw something that you need to alert a manager. And we try to work through different scenarios that they might see on the job site.”

**Positive Assertive Communication:** Assertive people clearly and respectfully communicate with each other. Given the opportunity to define, recognize, and practice assertive communication, your students will be better prepared to transition into adulthood, knowing how to self-advocate. Assertiveness promotes success in the workplace and other areas of life. In general, assertive people:

* make strong leaders
* maintain a positive outlook on life
* develop healthy personal and professional relationships
* solve problems because they are empowered to share their ideas and opinions with others
* show empathy
* and exhibit confidence

**Leadership Opportunities:** When completing self-advocacy activities, it is important to provide students with multiple opportunities to take on leadership roles. This will help them to build confidence with problem-solving, communication, and collaboration. Give students opportunities to practice this by putting them in a leadership role where they are the “go-to” person. Let them decide what type of task delegation, communication, and problem-solving systems they want to use for the people they are managing.

For example, students could be involved in a club or student council. Students may even want to organize their own special-interest club. Allowing students an opportunity to experience being a leader can help give them insight as to what it is like to be a supervisor at a job. Schedule some time to regularly meet with the student so that they can self-reflect on what leadership skills they have demonstrated and if they are in-need of any coaching or support

**Conclusion**: We hope you enjoyed this activity on Assertiveness Training. Discover additional activities and supplemental materials found in our self-advocacy course.