

Assertiveness and Managing Conflict

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Definition

- **What is Assertiveness?**

- A “mid-point”

Passive – **Assertive** – **Aggressive**

Assertive behaviour allows us to;

- Refuse requests.
- Ask for favours and make requests.
- Express positive and negative feelings.
- Initiate, continue and terminate general conversations.

**Lazarus AA, Behaviour Therapy & Beyond.
(McGraw-Hill 1971)**

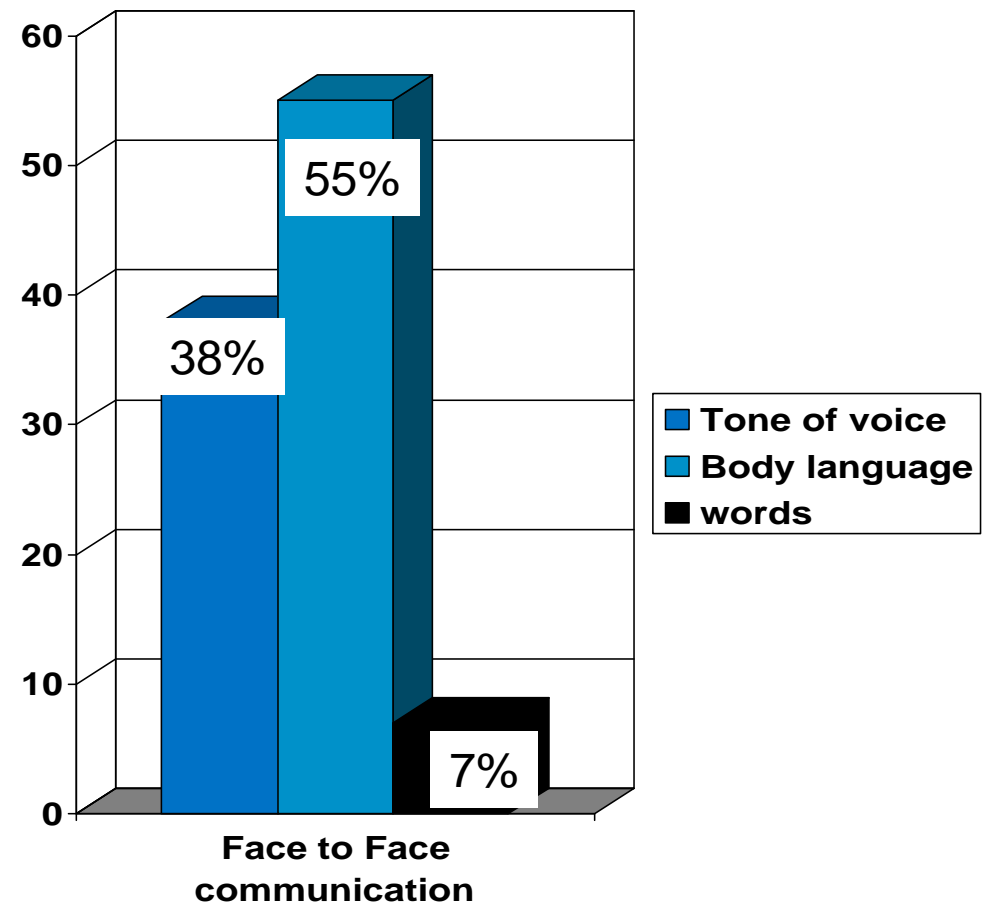
Why be assertive?

To help individuals to:

- Ensure personal rights are not violated
- Deal effectively unreasonable requests from others
- Recognise the personal rights of others
- Change the behaviour of others toward them
- Avoid unnecessary aggressive conflicts

Modes of communication

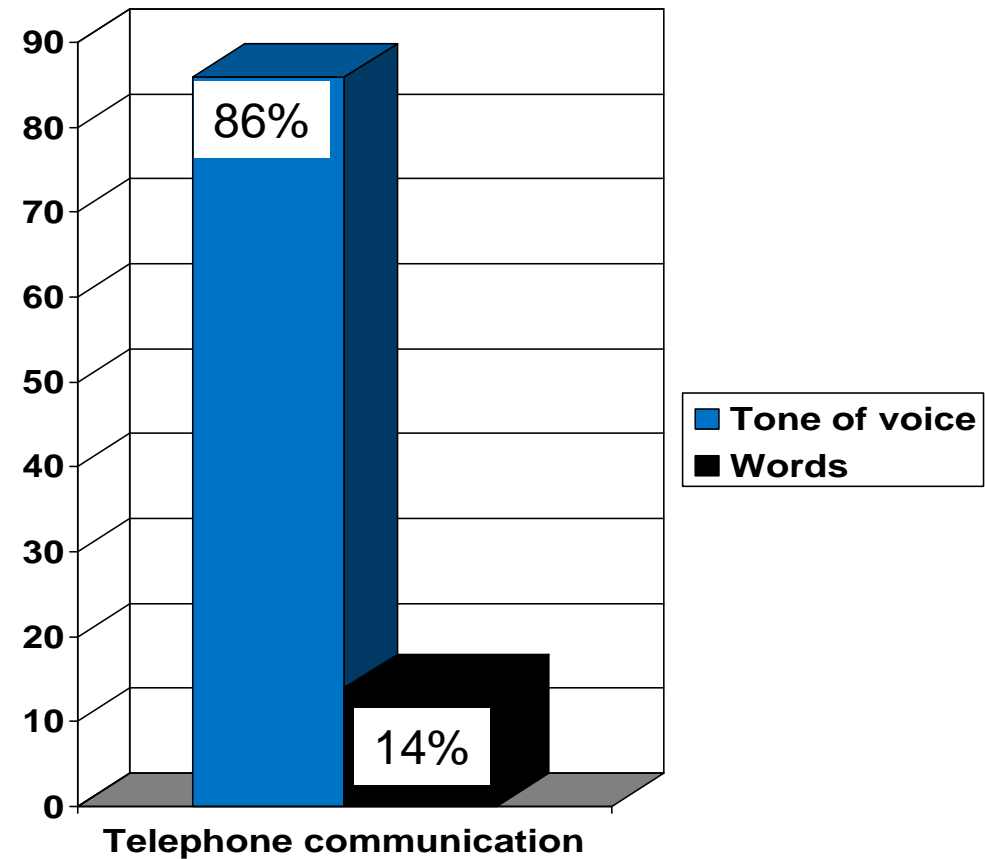
- **Face to face**
 - In a **face to face** situation it takes **60** seconds to make an initial impression ...



Modes of communication

- **Telephone**

- On the **telephone** it takes just **10** seconds to make a good or bad impression!



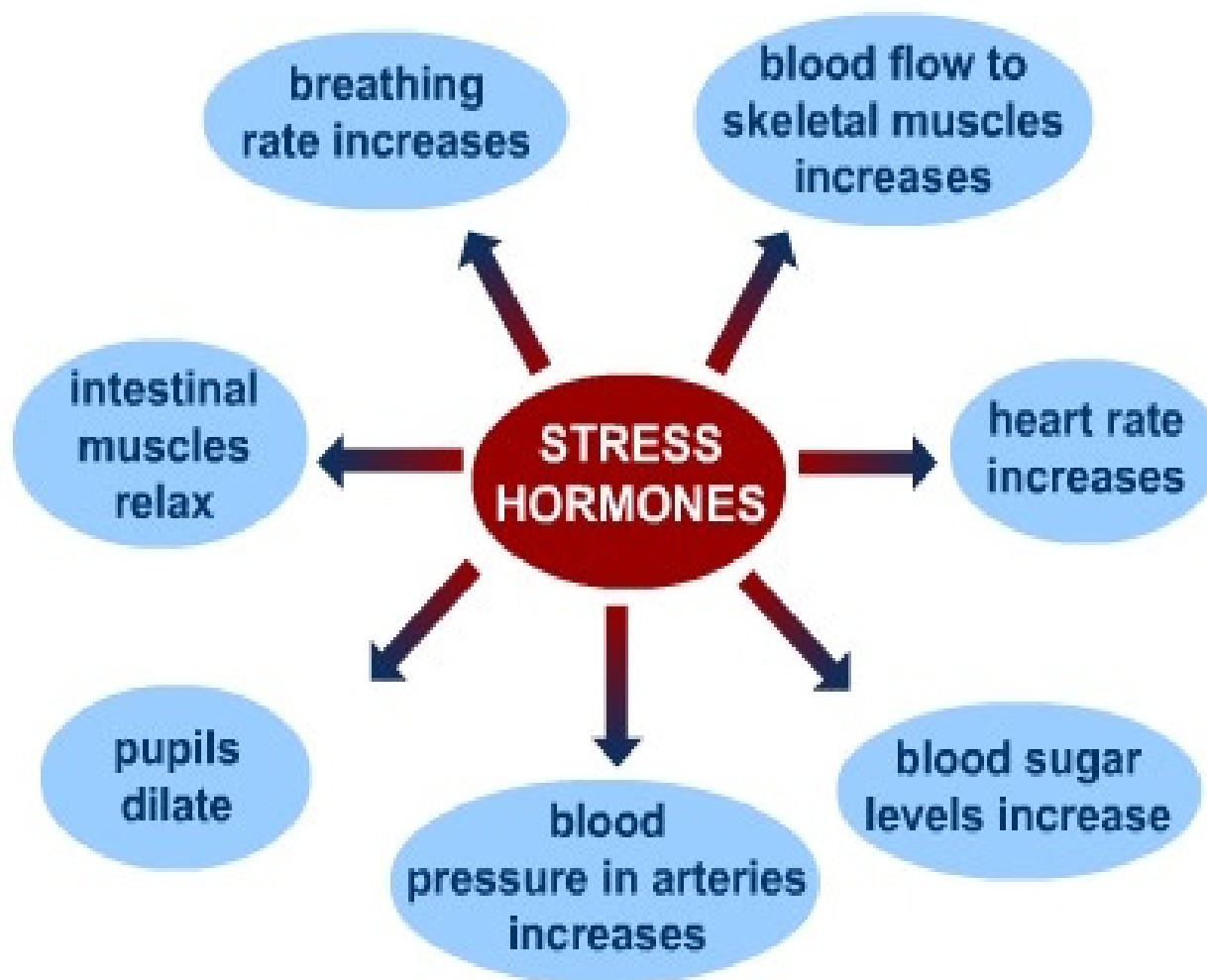
Response

- **Initial response can be emotional**
 - Irrational, anger, fear, excitement, love, fight or flight etc ...
- **Rational responses are slower**
 - Calm, relaxed.
 - Involves higher brain function

Pause

- **We need to be able to**
 - Take a mental breath
 - Calm the situation down
 - Take control
- **Rather than succumbing to a “knee- jerk” response.**

Not always easy ...



Good communications skills will help ...

- **Phone manner**

- How you answer the phone **Very** important – sets the mood.

- **Inflection and tone of voice**

- Critical

- **Pacing**

- To help control the conversation

- **Volume**

- Beware background noise that may make you or the caller have to raise their voice

Defusing conflict – when dealing with conflict we need to:

- **D**etect early signs of escalation
- **E**mploy self control
- **F**ocus on a solution
- **U**se active listening
- **S**ignal non-aggression
- **E**mpathise

Detect early signs of aggression

- Remember fight/flight symptoms
- Lack of basic courtesy
- Interruptions and over-talking
- Pitch of voice starts to rise
- Volume increases
- There may be vulgar / abusive
or threatening language

Employ self control

- Control your own fight / flight response
- Take a deep breath (don't hold it!)
- Do not get pulled into a conflict
- Do not 'bite' in response to
personal abuse
or threatening language
- Retain your state of
independence
- Maintain your professionalism!

Focus on a solution

- **Move the debate on to the future and the solution, rather than dwell on past occurrences**
- **Involve the caller in finding a solution**
- **If possible, offer choices or options to the caller**
- **If they have asked for something that you cannot provide, tell them what you can do instead**

Use active listening

- Focus your attention on them
- Use verbal prompts such as “I see” and “I understand” rather than “OK”
- Be patient & don’t interrupt
- Ask open questions (when, where, how etc) to enable you to fully understand the situation
- Summarise your understanding of the situation back to the caller when they have finished talking.

Signal non-aggression

- **Remember**, the caller, cannot see you,
– so it's best to:
- **Talk clearly at a steady pace**
- **Keep your tone of voice calm and relaxed (inflection)**
- **Avoid interrupting,**
- **Don't be condescending**
- **If you need to address their conduct – be ASSERTIVE**

Empathise

- It is about being able to see and understand another's viewpoint
- It is not to be confused with sympathy
- It is not about feeling sorry for someone or pretending to feel sorry for them
- It is a good way of building rapport
 - 'I am sorry that you are disappointed/ unhappy with...'
 - 'I can hear that this has upset you'
 - 'I understand how you must feel about this'

Use the correct language

- **Try not to be negative**

- Try not to say “Unfortunately ...” or “I’m afraid ...”

- **Don’t apologise**

- or say “can’t”, explain the facts and give information, “I’m unable to because ...”, Offer a solution

- **If you don’t think you can help**

- Suggest someone who can, if you can, put them in touch rather than giving them the run-around

- **Empathy**

- ‘I understand your position, however...’

Don't forget to thank them ...

- **Thank you for bringing this to my attention'**
- **'Thank you for giving me the chance to put things right'**
- **'Thank you for being so patient'**

Being Assertive



**Ineffective
performance**
Accepting abuse
Mumbling
**Apologising for
what you are doing**



**Clear, steady and firm
speech**
Remain calm
**Point out issues without
triggering aggression**
Professional



Giving orders
Raising voice
Admonishing
Hanging up
**Failure to
resolve**

Typical statements

SUBMISSIVE

“I’m sorry but it’s not my fault, it’s hospital policy...”

ASSERTIVE

“I can see that this is important to you and I really want to help, but your shouting is making it difficult for me to do that. If you can stay calm, I will do my best to help”.

AGGRESSIVE

“We don’t tolerate that sort of request doctor, so you’ll have to calm down or I will terminate the call”

Remember...

- **DON'T SAY 'SORRY' FOR ENFORCING POLICIES / PROCEDURES**
 - but you can say sorry about how you've made them feel.
- **NEVER apologise for doing your job!**
- **DON'T SAY 'CALM DOWN' – try instead 'I can hear that you are upset. Let's stay calm.'**
- **BE POSITIVE and proactive**
- **KNOW what you want and understand what they want**