

Assertiveness Webinar – Questions and Answers

Communication Within the Window of Tolerance

Questions:

- Do I delay a necessary conversation when we are not in our window? How do you do this?
- What is the best way to deal with someone who is clearly out of their window of tolerance but still wants to have the conversation?

Answers:

- As we discussed in the webinar, it is going to be quite challenging to communicate with someone if we are outside of our window or if they are outside of their window. This is because our logical/thinking part of our brain is offline when we are in a place of dysregulation. This means that it can be hard to express and receive information in a meaningful way. While it is important to have necessary conversations, it is always better to have them when you are feeling regulated.
- If you find that you are not within your window, it may be a good idea to delay the conversation until a later time or date to help you come back to the conversation when you are feeling better able to actively listen to the other person and discuss the topic at hand. This may mean taking a break and expressing your intention to return to the conversation later on (i.e., in 10 minutes, an hour, a day later, next week). Additionally, using skills to help keep yourself regulated during a conversation (i.e. taking a deep breath, self-soothing, using a positive affirmation in your head) may help you to stay regulated while engaging in the conversation
- There are several different ways to handle an interaction with someone who is outside of their window.
 1. It can be helpful to establish a shared understanding of the window of tolerance with the person you are communicating with before the conversation occurs. When the other person also understands that communication is not effective when we are outside of our window, then there can be a shared agreement to pause a conversation when person is outside of their window. When both communicators have the shared understanding and language of the window of tolerance, both can hold each other accountable during communication. We encourage you to share information about the window of tolerance with people you communicate with where possible.
 2. We understand that sharing information about the window of tolerance with others may not always be possible. If so, when you are communicating with someone who is outside of their window, we recommend:
 - a. Assessing your own safety. Physical and emotional safety is most important; do what you need to regain a sense of safety in the present moment (i.e., walk away, end the conversation).
 - b. If you are feeling safe enough, try to assert a boundary. “I cannot have this conversation with you when you are communicating with me in this way.” or “I will only continue this conversation if I feel respected during the communication”

DEARMAN (describe, explain, assert, reinforce, (be) mindful, appear confident, negotiate)

Questions:

- In the DEAR MAN example, are you suggesting one should choose which response to give or are they a series of steps you recommend taking?
- Why would you assert multiple times?

Answers:

- As discussed in the webinar, DEARMAN stands for describe, explain, assert, reinforce, (be) mindful, appear confident, and negotiate. This is a series of phrases that we can use to help us communicate our wants and needs.
- We encourage people to assert what their need is and reinforce why this is important to them. After this, be mindful of the response that you are getting from the person. They may express understanding of your need, or they may push back. If you are experiencing pushback, it may be helpful to use the “broken record technique” and reassert the need that you expressed earlier in the conversation. The broken record technique involves calmly repeating a firm statement or refusal multiple times, regardless of the other person's counterarguments or attempts to persuade

Fawning

Question:

- My problem is I fawn, and I don't know how to increase my aggression to an assertive level

Answers:

- Fawning is an unconscious, "knee-jerk" attempt to appease a perceived threat, often involving abandoning one's own needs and boundaries to feel safe. We engage in fawning when other responses do not feel safe to us. Fawning can be extremely adaptive in many situations, but we can appreciate that it may not feel like it is serving you in other situations. Establishing new patterns of behaviour can be challenging and take time. We encourage you to be compassionate with yourself as you try to make these changes. We recommend practicing/rehearsing more assertive responses with a person you trust and feel comfortable with. The more we practice different responses, the easier these responses will become with time
- We recommend starting with a “low stakes” situation (i.e., practicing with a trusted person) and slowly increasing the stakes as you become more confident
- Fawning tends to happen when we are outside of our window of tolerance, or feeling emotionally dysregulated. If you notice yourself beginning to fawn during a communication, try some grounding strategies to get back into your window, and attempt the communication again. The most effective communication happens when we are within our window of tolerance.

Do's and Don'ts

Question:

- What is a good example of explaining (giving a specific reason) vs “over-explaining”?

Answer:

- There can be a fine line between ‘explaining’ and ‘over-explaining’. We encourage you to try and keep your explanations clear and concise. Over-justification can be interpreted as a lack of confidence in one's choice, and can also lead to confusion or mixed messages. For example, if I am explaining why I am unable to attend a friend's event, rather than going into excessive detail about why I can't go, what I will be doing instead, or how bad I feel, etc., it is enough to say “I won't be able to make it to your event, as I am busy that day”. They may ask what you will be doing instead, in which case you can decide whether or not you want to provide more detail.

Question:

- What if you have poor short-term memory and want to listen actively, but also want to remember the needs and wants you want to communicate to the other person/people in the moment

Answer:

- It may be helpful to rehearse stating your needs and wants so that they are at the top of your mind. You may also find it helpful to write down your needs and wants and bring up your notes during your discussion. That way, you are able to listen actively, while still remembering what you would like to express. You could also tell the person about your memory concerns and request that you start the conversation by communicating your thoughts, so that you don't forget.

Question:

- There is a difference for me between being assertive with someone in a professional capacity and being assertive with someone in a more interpersonal situation. Assertiveness is also changed if I am interacting within a power differential or not. Can you speak to how one can navigate these dynamics?

Answer:

- We can appreciate that communication is nuanced and that different social dynamics can be important to take into consideration. We also want to highlight that assertive communication is professional and respectful. Though it may take practice, we can assertively communicate with colleagues, even in situations where there is a power differential

We recommend practicing assertive communication in a “low stakes” situation (i.e., with a trusted person, or with someone where the power is more balanced) and slowly increasing the stakes as you become more confident

Communication with Aggressive Communicators

Questions:

- I fear retaliation and escalation from an aggressive and bullying co-worker if I enforce my boundaries through being assertive. I feel it is safer to be passive and accept their treatment. I am not sure how to deal with this
- How might we use DEARMAN (or other strategies) when someone else ambushes you into a negotiation, triggers you, or manipulates you?

Answers:

- It is going to be difficult to use assertive communication skills with someone who is outside of their window of tolerance and is quite aggressive towards you
- In this situation, we encourage you to do what you can to respectfully leave this situation and revisit it when they are in a calmer and more regulated headspace, and you have had time to think about what your needs and wants are
- If you are finding that this is a pattern and that you are continually feeling disrespected by this person, it may be helpful to think about how you want to proceed with this relationship
- It may be helpful to revisit what a healthy relationship looks and feels like for you. The mental health program is happy to connect with you for a single session to discuss this further and provide support moving forward

Connect with the Mental Health Program at Taddle Creek if you'd like to learn more

To book a single session call 416-260-1315 ext. 0

Supports to use if you feel that you are in an abusive relationship:

Crisis lines, hotlines, and immediate support - *These are listed as 24/7 or crisis-type supports intended for immediate counselling, safety planning, or connection to services.*

- Sexual Assault / Domestic Violence Care Centre (WCH) — 416-323-6040
- Toronto Rape Crisis Centre — 416-597-8808
- Assaulted Women's Help Line — 416-863-0511
- Fem'aide (French support) — 1-877-336-2433
- Distress Centre — 416-408-4357
- Police Emergency — 911
- Police Non-Emergency — 416-808-2222
- Victim Support Line — 416-314-2447
- Ontario Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Navigation Line — 1-855-628-7238
- Talk4Healing (Indigenous women) — 1-855-554-4325
- Kids Help Phone — 1-800-668-6868
- Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse Line — 1-866-887-0015
- Trans Lifeline — 1-877-330-6366
- Human Trafficking Hotline — 1-833-900-1010

Victim support, crisis response, and community support services - *These provide immediate support after crime, trauma, or mental health crisis.*

- Victim Services Toronto — 416-808-7066
- Gerstein Centre (mental health crisis support) — 416-929-5200

Shelter and housing related supports - *These help with emergency shelter and housing pathways for people leaving violence*

- Red Door Family Shelter — 416-423-0310 or 1-866-863-0511
- Central Family Intake (Toronto family shelter access) — 416-397-5637
- Housing Connections (City of Toronto housing support website)