Becoming a Resilient Scientist

SERIES

Workbook III:
Self-Advocacy &
Assertiveness for Scientists

Dr. Sharon L. Milgram
Director, NIH OITE
Bethesda, MD

Fall 2021 Edition

This workbook is intended to accompany
Becoming A Resilient Scientist Series Unit 3: Self-Advocacy & Assertiveness.

It is most effective when it is used after attending/watching the workshop lecture. The exercises in this workbook are to help you process and solidify what you’ve learned in the lecture and to provide you with additional resources. Although it is encouraged that you complete the exercises, it is not required.
**Assertiveness** is the ability to:

- **Express** one’s feelings and **assert** one’s rights and needs while respecting the feelings, rights and needs of others.

- Use communication that is **direct, open and honest** to address situations that concern you.

- Set **appropriate boundaries** that feel right given the context and situation.
When we set boundaries, we determine:

- Which **actions, statements** and **behaviors** we will accept from others and what we will not.
- What we **will share and not share** with others.

Setting boundaries helps us **avoid**:

- **Over-working** ourselves
- Taking on **someone else’s** emotions/thoughts
- Violating personal/professional **ethics**
- Input that is **incorrect and unwarranted**
- Doing things we **do not want to do**
Boundaries are learned in childhood, from our families, culture, and prior experiences.

Some things that get in the way of our ability to set boundaries are:

1. **Cognitive distortions**  
   (Think HATS! Refer to lecture #2 and/or Workbook #2)

2. **Gaps in our emotional literacy**  
   (Think AIR/RABBITS! Also in lecture and Workbook #2)

3. Lack of **self-confidence**

4. **Lack of assertiveness skills**

5. Our view of **hierarchy**
IMPACT OF FAMILY & CULTURE ON SETTING BOUNDARIES

How is my current understanding of boundaries shaped by my families and cultures?

- What learning is often helpful to me?
- What learning is not always (or ever) helpful to me?
What boundaries would help me handle the **current situation(s)** I find myself in?

- What would I love to **say no to** right now?
- What would I love to **say yes to** right now?
What actions do I need to take to begin putting helpful boundaries into place now?
IMPACT OF FAMILY & CULTURE ON ASSERTION

1. What did you learn about being assertive and having difficult conversations from your families and cultures?
2. Which messages are generally helpful to you now and which are not?

KEY CONCEPT
Letting go of maladaptive behaviors takes commitment and practice, but it can absolutely be done!
JOURNALING EXERCISE V

IMPACT OF FAMILY & CULTURE ON ASSERTION

1. Think about an important relationship at work or at home. Consider a time when you struggled to be assertive and communicate your needs effectively. Focus on what happened, why it happened, how it made you feel and anything you wish had gone differently.

2. Now focus on a time you were assertive and communicated your needs effectively. Focus on what happened, why it happened, how it made you feel and anything you might wish it had gone differently.
What **approach** is appropriate for the situation?

What are the **options** available to me?

What is the **best possible outcome** for me?

What is the **worst possible outcome** for me?

Are there some **middle outcomes** I can be happy with?

What **questions** do I need answered to make a good decision?

Are there things I can **offer to mitigate** the concerns and address the needs of another party?

**Who** can help me prepare?

And when necessary.... who can add to my **safety**?
"I"-Statements: Taking responsibility for your feelings, wants, and needs AND expressing them clearly.

Empathic Listening: Periodically summarizing what we think the communicator thinks, feels, means and needs without necessarily agreeing.

Negative/Positive Inquiry: Using questions to probe the meaning of feedback when you want/need more information to facilitate your learning.

Fogging: Calmly responding with a minimal response focusing on any truth in the statement without being defensive or argumentative.

Stuck Record: Repeating what you want, time and time again, without raising the tone of your voice, becoming angry, irritated, or distracted by side issues.
"I"-Statements: Taking responsibility for your feelings, wants, and needs AND expressing them clearly (from pg 11)

"I"-Statement structure:
- "I feel..."
- "When ________. I..."
- "Because of ________, I..."
- "I would like..."

(You may not always use all four parts)

Reflect on a current situation where you need to be assertive. In the box below, craft your "I"-statement(s) and practice:
Will it help me reach one of my important goals?

Does it provide an intangible benefit important to me right now?

Do I need to do it now or can this wait?

What else is going on? Where does this rank in my priorities?

Is it a request from someone I cannot ignore?

Is it a request from someone I really care about?

Will it matter a week/month/year from now?

Will it matter if I don’t do it?
When saying "no", **do not over-apologize** and do not say “ask again” unless you mean it.

Some effective ways to **say "no"**:

- "I have a lot going on and really can’t take on anything new right now."

- "My current situation makes it difficult for me to…"

- "I can’t participate in this. Maybe another time."

- "I would like to help you with ________, but this is a very busy time for me. Let’s schedule a time to meet and talk about it."

Reflect on a current situation where you **need to say "No"**. In the box below, craft your No-Statement and practice:
ADD SOME FUN WITH C.A.T.S. & D.O.G.S.

When trying to advocate for yourself and be assertive when necessary, remember:

C – Clear asks & assertiveness strategies
A – Assess risks & rewards
T – Try to expand options
S – Soften distorted thinking
D – Don't go unprepared
O – Offer or ask for time as needed
G – Growth mindset
   (this is a learned skill and it is difficult to foster)
S – Seek advice & support when stakes are high
BOOKS

Paterson, R.J., 2000. The assertiveness workbook: How to express your ideas and stand up for yourself at work and in relationships. New Harbinger Publications.


JOURNAL ARTICLES


HELPFUL WEBSITES
http://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/communication.htm
https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ps/assertiveness-techniques.html#ixzz4GAPdadCi