



SEIU 775
BENEFITS GROUP

Learner Handbook

ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION



About SEIU 775 Benefits Group

The SEIU 775 Benefits Group trains and develops professional long-term care workers to deliver high-quality care and support to older adults and people with disabilities. The SEIU 775 Benefits Group also negotiates and purchases high-quality health care benefits for long-term care workers in Washington and Montana.

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SEIU 775 BENEFITS GROUP

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Assertive Communication

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Course Overview

Description

In this course, you will learn about assertive and nonassertive communication styles and how assertive communication helps on the job. You will also learn to use nonverbal and verbal assertive communication techniques to protect against unwanted behaviors.

This course takes three hours to complete.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Identify the difference between assertive and nonassertive communication styles.
- Explain the benefits of exercising the right to communicate assertively on the job.
- Model assertive nonverbal (body) language.
- Model assertive communication techniques to protect against unwanted behavior.

Course Agenda

This table shows the agenda for the course.

Agenda Item	Time (min)
Introduction and Welcome	5
Preassessment	15
Lesson 1: Assertive and Nonassertive Communication Styles	40
Assertive Communication	
The Benefits of Assertive Communication	
What Is Nonassertive Communication?	
The Effects of Nonassertive Communication	
Cultural Variations in Assertiveness	
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Common Barriers to Assertive Communication	
The Rights of Caregivers to Communicate Assertively	
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Practices for the Basic Assertion Technique	
Practices for the Empathic Assertion Technique	
Practices for the Broken Record Technique	
Practices for the Selective Ignoring Technique	
Practices for the Assertive Withdrawal Technique	
Practices for the Negative Feelings Assertion Technique	
The Importance of Saying No	
Improving Assertive Communication Skills	
Resources and Conclusion	15
Resources	
Summary and Closing	
Postassessment	
Total: 3 hrs	180

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Lesson 1: Assertive and Nonassertive Communication Styles

Discussion: What Is Assertive Communication?

Notes:

Assertive Communication

- Assertive Communication is expressing your thoughts and needs clearly to others without putting down their feelings and opinions.
- It is expressing what you think, how you feel, and what you want in an honest, appropriate, respectful, and direct manner.
- Assertiveness is not a personality trait but a skill that anyone can learn over time.

Knowledge Check: Assertive Communication

Instructions: Circle the best answer to the following question.

Which of these statements best describes assertive communication?

- a. Loudly expressing your feelings and opinions without thinking about others
- b. Using a quiet tone and physically moving away from a confrontation
- c. Clearly expressing your thoughts and needs to others without putting down their feelings and opinions

Activity: Perri's Scenarios?

Which of these scenarios best demonstrates assertive communication?

Perri's Scenario 1:

Perri works with Mr. Humphrey as a caregiver.

Perri says, "Mr. Humphrey, would you like me to turn on the television?"

Mr. Humphrey says, "I can do it if I want to. You are always trying to control me, you idiot!"

Perri says, "I am sorry that you feel that way. I am just offering to help, Mr. Humphrey."

Perri's Scenario 2:

Perri says, "Mr. Humphrey, would you like me to turn on the television?"

Mr. Humphrey says, "I can do it if I want to. You are always trying to control me, you idiot!"

Perri says, "Mr. Humphrey, I do not like the way you are talking to me. I never try to control you. I am just offering to help."

Notes:

The Benefits of Assertive Communication

Assertive communication helps:

- Improve self-confidence
- Promote honest, open relationships with others
- Make you more connected to others
- Make you feel in control of your life
- Address issues and problems as they arise
- Create a respectful environment for both you and others to grow and mature

Knowledge Check: The Benefits of Assertive Communication

Instructions: Circle the best answer(s) to the following question.

Which of the following are benefits of assertive communication? (Circle all that apply.)

- a. Improving self-confidence
- b. Making you more connected to others
- c. Making you feel in control of your life
- d. Helping you address issues aggressively

Activity: Role-Playing

Instructions: One of you will play the caregiver, and the other person will play the client. Follow the scripts below and then swap roles.

Script 1:

Mr. Humphrey is on the phone with a friend and says, "No problem. I will have my maid prepare it. She is a good cook."

The caregiver walks to the client and says, "I am a caregiver, not your maid. Being called a maid makes me so uncomfortable. I do not think you are treating me as a healthcare professional. Please call me by my name."

Script 2:

Mr. Humphrey is on the phone with a friend and says, “No problem. I will have my maid prepare it. She is a good cook.”

The caregiver walks to the client and says, “I am sorry, but can you call me by my name?”

Nonassertive Communication

Passive (Submissive) Communication	Failing to express thoughts, feelings, and beliefs honestly. When conflict occurs, you apologize even if you did nothing wrong. You allow the other person to be more important than you.
Aggressive Communication	Expressing feelings and opinions and advocating for your needs in a demanding, abrasive, or threatening way. The goals of this kind of communication are domination and winning. You see your feelings as more important than the feelings of others. You violate others’ rights.
Passive-Aggressive Communication	Acting out of anger or resentment in indirect or backhanded ways. You see your feelings and needs as important, but you feel powerless to stand up for your rights.

Examples of Nonassertive Communication

Passive Communication

Notes:

Aggressive Communication

Notes:

Passive-Aggressive Communication

Notes:

Activity: Types of Nonassertive Communication

Instructions: Read the following three scenarios. Then, circle the correct type of nonassertive communication for each scenario.

Scenario 1

Mr. Humphrey is on the phone. He says, "No problem. I will have my maid prepare it." Perri hears him and yells, "No way! You are such an idiot. How dare you say that again!"

Which type of communication did Perri use in this example?

- a. Passive communication
- b. Aggressive communication
- c. Passive-aggressive communication

Scenario 2

Mr. Humphrey is on the phone. He says, "No problem. I will have my maid prepare it." Perri hears him and says, "I am sorry Mr. Humphrey. But...fine."

Which type of communication did Perri use in this example?

- a. Passive communication
- b. Aggressive communication
- c. Passive-aggressive communication

Scenario 3

Mr. Humphrey is on the phone. He says, "No problem. I will have my maid prepare it." Perri hears him and mutters quietly, "I am not your maid." Then, Perri slams the door and walks into another room.

Which type of communication did Perri use in this example?

- a. Passive Communication
- b. Aggressive Communication
- c. Passive-aggressive Communication

Knowledge Check: Matching the Types of Nonassertive Communication

Instructions: Match the types of nonassertive communication with the appropriate description. Place the letter for the type of nonassertive communication next to the correct description.

Description	Type of Nonassertive Communication
___ 1. Expressing feelings, opinions and needs in a demanding, abrasive, or threatening way.	a. Passive Communication b. Aggressive Communication c. Passive-Aggressive Communication
___ 2. Acting out of anger or resentment in indirect or backhanded ways.	
___ 3. Failing to express thoughts, feelings, and beliefs honestly. Apologizing when conflict occurs, even when you did nothing wrong.	

The Effects of Nonassertive Communication

Types of Nonassertive Communication	Effects
Passive Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having unmet needs • Experiencing low self-esteem • Not feeling in control of life
Aggressive Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having unmet needs • Escalating rather than defusing a situation • Blaming others for their actions and problems • Becoming isolated from others • Generating fear and hatred
Passive-Aggressive Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having unmet needs • Becoming isolated from others • Feeling powerlessness • Wasting energy with ineffective communication

Activity: The Effects of Nonassertive Communication

Instructions: Read the scenario. Then, discuss the possible effects of Tam's response.

Mr. Brown walks into the kitchen and says, "Hey boy, I want to go for a walk." Tam says, "I am warning you! Do not call me boy again! You are so stupid!"

What are some possible effects of Tam's response?

Lesson 2: Benefits of Assertive Communication

Trigger warning! The following lesson contains material about physical violence, abuse, and aggression toward caregivers.

Discussion: Common Barriers to Assertive Communication

Instructions: Discuss with someone near you.

Do you usually communicate assertively? Have you experienced any barriers while trying to communicate assertively?

Notes:

Knowledge Check: Barriers to Assertive Communication

Instructions: Circle the best answer(s) to the following question.

Which caregiver behaviors are barriers to assertive communication? (Circle all that apply.)

- a. They believe they do not have the right to be assertive
- b. They think they must do everything for the person they care for
- c. They want to avoid judgments and rejection
- d. They believe they are not very good at expressing themselves

Caregiver Rights

State your own needs and set your priorities as a person.
Be treated with respect as an intelligent, capable, and equal human being.
Express your feelings, opinions, and values.
Make mistakes.
Change your mind.
Ask for what you want.
Do not take responsibility for other people's problems.
Have dignity and self-respect.
Say yes or no without feeling coerced or guilty.
Feel good about yourself.
Negotiate and reach compromises when conflict arises.

Activity: Sabrina's Scenario

Instructions: Read the scenario. Then, answer the following question.

Sabrina works with Mr. Won as a caregiver.

Mr. Won says, "Sabrina, can you walk my dog? My daughter is out running an errand."

Sabrina says, "No, I cannot. Walking your dog is not listed in the care plan."

Mr. Won says, "If you do not walk him, he will not get a walk today."

Sabrina says, "You can ask other family members or friends to walk him."

What right(s) did Sabrina demonstrate in this scenario?

Activity: Alma's Scenario

Instructions: Read the scenario. Then, answer the following question.

Alma went to see a new client. While she was there, a family member of the client found something inaccurate in the care plan and blamed Alma. Alma explained that the care plan is made by the case manager. She said she would talk with the case manager about the issue in the care plan.

What right(s) did Alma demonstrate in this scenario?

The Benefits of Assertive Communication in Caregiving

Get needs met	As a caregiver, you are entitled to have your needs met. Stating your needs directly makes it more likely those needs will be met, which is crucial to prevent burnout and provide better care for clients
Establish healthy boundaries	By expressing clearly what you want and what is off-limits, you create and maintain boundaries in the client's home.
Manage stress	Overwork and doing the tasks not listed in the care plan can cause stress. Communicating assertively can help prevent doing tasks not in the care plan and ease the stress.
Earn others' respect	Being assertive means you respect yourself and are willing to stand up for your interests. It also shows that you are aware of the rights of others. Respecting yourself and others earns people's respect.
Boost self-esteem	When you earn others' respect, your self-esteem may improve.

Help Against Abuse



Assertiveness Training

Studies have shown that assertiveness training that focuses on conflict resolution and communication skills is an effective method of coping with abuse.

Knowledge Check: Benefits of Assertive Communication in Caregiving

Instructions: Place a check mark next to all of the items that are benefits of assertive communication in caregiving.

Benefits of Assertive Communication

- Getting your needs met
- Managing stress
- Establishing healthy boundaries
- Earning others' respect
- Having power over the client
- Controlling over the client's life
- Boosting self-esteem
- Having less work to do

Activity: Lily's Scenario

Instructions: Read the scenario. Then, discuss the following question with someone near you.

Lily works with Mr. Baker as a caregiver.

Mr. Baker says, "Can I borrow some money from you? I have to pay my mortgage."

Lily says, "No, you cannot. Mr. Baker, it makes me uncomfortable when you ask to borrow money from me."

Mr. Baker says, "If you do not lend money to me, I will report you to your case manager for abuse."

If you were Lily, what would you do?

Notes:

Activity: Sandy's Scenario

Instructions: Read the scenario. Then, answer the following question.

Mr. Berg wants to use the bathroom and asks Sandy to help take off his pants. Assisting with toileting is not listed in the client's care plan.

If you were Sandy, what would you do?

Notes:

Nonassertive Communication Can Be Beneficial

Discussion: Have you ever used nonassertive communication in a situation? How did it go?

Notes:

Knowledge Check: Nonassertive Communication

Instructions: Circle the best answer to the following question.

Which of these statements is true?

- a. Using assertive communication is the best way to solve problems in every situation
- b. Aggressive communication can always prevent a problem from becoming worse
- c. Passive communication can be a safer option when you think a conflict may escalate to violence

Activity: Joan's Scenario

Instruction: Read the scenario. Then, discuss the following question with someone near you.

Mr. Bean has misplaced his television remote and blames the caregiver, Joan, for losing it. He points a finger in Joan's face and says, "This is all your fault. You never do anything right!"

If you were Joan, what type of communication would you use? What would you do or say?

Notes:

Activity: Sandra's Scenario

Instructions: Read the scenario. Then, answer the following question.

Mr. Kim has been lying in bed all day. The caregiver, Sandra, approaches him and asks if he is OK. Mr. Kim's puts his hand on Sandra's thigh and rubs it suggestively.

If you were Sandra, what type of communication would you use? What would you do or say?

Notes:

Lesson 3: Assertive Body Language

The Importance of Assertive Body Language



Body Language

Research suggests that between 50% and 80% of communication is nonverbal. Awareness of body language is vital.

Video: How to Use Assertive Body Language

Notes:

Activity: Suggestions for Assertive Body Language

Instructions: Write down any body language suggestions you would give to Tara.

Notes:

Video: Passive Body Language

Notes:

Video: Aggressive Body Language

Notes:

Knowledge Check: Neeta's Scenario

Instructions: Read the scenario. Then, answer the following question.

Neeta is talking with a client about their care plan. Neeta's eyes are wide, and she is staring at the client. Her arms are folded, and her fists are clenched.

Which type of body language is Neeta using?

Notes:

Knowledge Check: Masha's Scenario

Instructions: Read the scenario. Then, answer the following question.

Masha is talking with a client about their care plan. Masha is looking at the floor, crossing her arms, and speaking very softly.

Which type of body language is Masha using?

Notes:

Discussion: Body Language to Be Avoided

Instructions: Write down some examples of body language that should be avoided when communicating assertively.

Notes:

Lesson 4: Assertive Verbal Communication Techniques

Common Assertive Communication Techniques

Basic Assertion	Basic assertion is the most common assertive communication technique. It is the foundation for all of the other techniques in this list. It is a simple, direct expression of your needs, wants, beliefs, opinions, or feelings. It works best when you are facing an issue for the first time.
Empathic Assertion	Empathic assertion is recognizing another person's situation, feelings, or needs, and standing up for your rights.
Broken Record Technique	The broken record technique is preparing what you are going to say and repeating it. While using this technique, keep your voice calm. Avoid sounding angry or raising your voice.
Selective Ignoring	The selective ignoring technique is refusing to respond to specific issues. You can repeatedly state that you will not discuss a particular issue or change the subject.
Assertive Withdrawal	The assertive withdrawal technique sending a clear signal to end a conversation. The signal can be verbal or nonverbal. This technique is typically used in a situation that is out of control.
Negative Feelings Assertion	The negative feelings assertion technique is drawing attention to the negative feelings caused by someone. It can be used when experiencing anger, resentment, or pain because of someone's words or actions

Knowledge Check: Common Assertive Communication Techniques

Instructions: Circle the best answer to the following question.

Which assertive communication technique is the foundation for all other techniques?

- a. Basic assertion technique
- b. Broken record technique
- c. Assertive withdrawal technique.

Video: How to Use the Basic Assertion Technique

Notes:

Activity: Luna's Scenario

Instructions: Read the scenario. Then, answer the following question.

Luna is usually off work at 3 p.m. It is 2 p.m. now. Luna is working on a meal plan with the client she cares for when the client asks Luna to work late.

If you were Luna, which assertive communication technique would you choose? How would you refuse?

Notes:

Video: How to Use the Empathic Assertion Technique

Notes:

Activity: Ishal's Scenario

Instructions: Read the scenario. Then, discuss the following question with someone near you.

Mrs. Collins lives alone and has no family nearby. She always asks the caregiver, Ishal, to stay longer so she will not feel lonely.

If you were Ishal, which assertive communication technique would you choose? How would you refuse?

Notes:

Video: How to Use the Broken Record Technique

Notes:

Activity: Alesya's Scenario

Instructions: Read the scenario. Then, answer the following question.

Alesya has a client who repeatedly calls her an offensive name. She told the client not to call her that name, but the client will not stop.

If you were Alesya, which assertive communication technique would you choose? What would you say to the client?

Notes:

Video: How to Use the Selective Ignoring Technique

Notes:

Activity: Umida's Scenario

Instructions: Read the scenario. Then, answer the following question.

Umida is chatting with a client during a lunch break. The client asks why Umida got divorced. Umida does not want to talk about it. The client says, "I swear I will not tell anyone else if you tell me."

If you were Umida, which assertive communication technique would you choose? What would you say to the client?

Notes:

Video: How to Use the Assertive Withdrawal Technique

Notes:

Activity: Ivor's Scenario

Instructions: Read the scenario. Then, discuss the following question with someone near you.

Ivor is assisting the client, Mr. Sam, with a bed bath. Ivor tested the water temperature before the bed bath. The client yells at Ivor, "Are you trying to kill me? It is too hot!"

If you were Ivor, which assertive communication technique would you choose? What would you do?

Notes:

Video: How to Use the Negative Feelings Assertion Technique

Notes:

Activity: Seong's Scenario

Instructions: Read the scenario. Then, answer the following question.

Seong went to meet a new client, Mr. Bean. Mr. Bean looked Seong up and down and said, "Do not tell me you are my caregiver. Are you sure you know how to take care of people?"

If you were Seong, which assertive communication technique would you choose? What would you do?

Notes:

How to Use the Negative Feelings Assertion Technique

Steps	Example
Use statements and facts to describe the other person's behavior. Avoid interpreting others' behavior.	<i>"When you call me names like "honey" and "darling, ..."</i>
Describe the effect of the person's behavior on you. Be specific and clear. Do not overgeneralize.	<i>"... makes me very uncomfortable."</i>
Describe your feelings.	<i>You could say something like, "I do not feel like you are treating me as a professional."</i>
State how you would prefer the behavior to be in the future.	<i>"Please call me by my name, _____, in the future."</i>

The Importance of Saying No



When Saying No

- Do not apologize or give elaborate reasons. It is your right to say no to things that are not listed in the care plan.
- Be straightforward and honest but not rude.
- Keep it brief.
- Speak slowly and calmly.
- Do not blame or make excuses.
- When saying no, take responsibility for what you want.

Ways to Improve Assertive Communication Skills



Ways to Improve Assertive Communication Skills

- **Understand your current communication style.**
 - Do you tend to say what is on your mind or remain silent?
 - Do you agree to do additional work even when you can barely cope?
 - Are you quick to respond in an angry tone?
 - Do people seem to fear talking to you?
- **Decide to communicate assertively.** Commit to communicating assertively. Plan to practice the techniques that you learned in this course.
- **Start small.**
 - Practice your new skills in situations that are low risk.
 - Talk assertively in front of a mirror or with a friend.
 - Pay attention to your body language and the words you say.
 - Evaluate yourself after practicing and tweak your approach as necessary.
- **Practice saying no.** If you have a hard time turning down requests, try saying, “No, I cannot do that now.” Do not hesitate—be direct. If an explanation is appropriate, keep it brief.
- **Rehearse what you want to say.**
 - If it is challenging to say what you want or think, practice typical scenarios you encounter.
 - Say what you want to say out loud. It may help to write it out first, so you can practice from a script.
 - Consider role-playing with a friend or colleague and ask for direct feedback.
- **Be patient.** Being assertive is a skill that needs practice. Remember that you will sometimes do better at it than others, but you can always learn from your mistakes.

Course Key Terms

Key Terms	Definitions
Aggressive communication	Expressing your feelings, opinions, and needs in a demanding, abrasive, or threatening way. The goals of this kind of communication are domination and winning. You see your feelings as more important than the feelings of others. You violate others' rights.
Assertive communication	Expressing your thoughts and needs clearly, honestly, and respectfully. It does not mean belittling the feelings or opinions of others.
Passive-aggressive communication	Acting out of anger or resentment in indirect or backhanded ways. You see your feelings and needs as important, but you feel powerless to stand up for your rights.
Passive communication	Failing to express your thoughts, feelings, and beliefs honestly. When conflict occurs, you apologize even if you did nothing wrong. You allow the other person to be more important than you.

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