

LifeSkills Training

Promoting Health and Personal Development

Teacher's Manual 1

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LifeSkills Training Middle School program, Level 1, Teacher's Manual

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Assertiveness

Unit Timing: 2 sessions, 45 minutes each

Vocabulary

- assertive
- aggressive
- passive

Key to Teaching Strategies

- F**▶ Facilitation
- C**▶ Coaching
- BR**▶ Behavioral Rehearsal
- A**▶ Assessment

Materials Needed

- Student Guide (pages 78 – 83)

Special Preparation

- Be prepared to demonstrate the verbal and nonverbal assertive skills covered in this unit.
- Photocopy Appendix 1 (page 14.13) for the Demonstrating and Practicing Drug Refusal Skills activity (page 14.10).

Unit Goals and Objectives

One of the hardest things to do can be to say “no,” whether it be to a friend or someone pressuring us to do something. In this unit, students learn to recognize different ways people exert pressure. They also identify and practice both verbal and nonverbal techniques that help them to say “no” so that other people know they mean it.

This unit is designed to be presented in two sessions so that students have sufficient time to practice the skills.

In this unit students will:

- Identify common situations in which people often fail to be assertive
- Identify persuasive tactics
- Identify and practice verbal assertive skills
- Identify and practice nonverbal assertive skills
- Discuss alternative ways for dealing with situations in which teens are pressured to smoke, drink, or use marijuana

Introduction

Tell students that there are many situations that we all encounter in which we may find it difficult to express ourselves honestly and openly or stand up for our rights when they are violated. This unit deals with learning how to handle these kinds of situations more effectively – that is, how to be more assertive.

F▶ **Assertive Situations (10 minutes)**

1. Go over the homework assignment, *Worksheet 23, Handling Difficult Situations* on page 80 in the **Student Guide**, and have students identify situations where they had difficulty expressing their feelings honestly and openly or had a hard time standing up for their rights.
2. Then select volunteers to share their situations with the class, giving their reasons for not standing up for their rights in these situations.
3. Make a list of these situations on the board.

▶ A. Describe a common situation where you have trouble being assertive.
B. List the reason(s) why you don't stand up for your rights or express your true feelings to your friends.
C. Now imagine you are being pressured to smoke cigarettes by friends or classmates. Describe the situation and how you would handle it.

The image shows a digital worksheet titled "Handling Difficult Situations" with the number "23" in the top right corner. The worksheet is divided into three main sections, each with a light blue background and rounded corners. Section A, labeled "A. Situation", has three horizontal lines for writing. Section B, labeled "B. Reasons Why", also has three horizontal lines. Section C, labeled "C. Describe the situation.", has four horizontal lines. Below the main section C, there is a sub-section labeled "How I would handle it" with three horizontal lines. The worksheet is displayed within a window-like frame with a pencil icon on the right side. At the bottom left of the frame, there is a small star icon and the text "80 Student Guide 1". At the bottom right, there is a dark blue box with the white text "SG page 80".

Examples

- Saying “no” to a request by a friend
- Expressing a difference of opinion
- Asking a favor
- Telling a person if there is something about him/her that bugs you
- Returning defective merchandise
- Telling a cashier when he/she has shortchanged you
- Having someone cut in line ahead of you
- Telling a teacher or parent that he/she is being unfair
- Saying “no” to someone trying to sell you something

F▶ Understanding Assertiveness (5 minutes)

1. Tell students that individuals may respond to these situations in three different ways.
 - The first and most common way of handling these situations is by being *passive* (non-assertive). This may involve avoiding a confrontation, ignoring the situation, or giving in to the other person.
 - A second way of handling these situations is by being *aggressive*. This may involve “attacking” the other person, over-reacting, or being obnoxious.
 - The final and most appropriate way of handling these situations is by being *assertive*. This involves standing up for your own rights and expressing yourself in an honest, open, and responsible fashion.
2. Have students define *passive*, *aggressive*, and *assertive*.

Definition

Passive means accepting without objection or resistance, not responding or reacting to something you feel strongly about.

Aggressive means acting in a hostile manner that may infringe on others’ rights.

Assertive means calmly and firmly standing up for your rights without infringing on the rights of others.

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3. Ask the students for examples of how some of the above examples (choose two or three) might be handled in passive, aggressive, and assertive ways.

F▶ **Reasons for Not Being Assertive (5 minutes)**

1. Ask students why people sometimes do not stand up for their rights or express their feelings.
2. Develop a list of common reasons and write some of them on the board.

Examples

- Not wanting to start an argument
- Not wanting to create a scene
- Being afraid to look foolish
- Not wanting to offend the other person
- Rationalizing and saying that it's not really that important or not wanting to make a big deal about it

F▶ **Benefits of Being Assertive (5 minutes)**

1. Ask students what they think can be gained from being assertive.
2. Make a list of these benefits on the board.

Points to Make

There are a number of benefits to be gained from being assertive. These include:

- personal satisfaction
- increased likelihood of getting the things you want out of life
- better feelings about yourself (increased self-esteem)
- increased sense of control over your life
- increased sense of personal honesty
- decreased anxiety resulting from interpersonal conflict
- increased ability to exercise your own rights and not be taken advantage of
- respect and admiration from other people



Verbal Assertive Skills (20 minutes)

Three different verbal assertive skills will be taught in this unit – saying “no,” making requests (asking favors), and asserting our rights.

Refusal Skills

1. Inform students that an important part of being assertive is in how we communicate our message. Our message is more likely to be heard -- and believed – when we use a firm tone of voice and speak clearly at a rate that conveys confidence.
2. Review and demonstrate the assertive skills for saying “no.” (Refer to the **Student Guide** on page 79 and to page 14.6.) The first general assertive skill involves teaching individuals to say “no” or take a stand when they need to respond to a request or a demand to do something that they do not want to do. This consists of a three-step procedure.

How to Be More Assertive

Saying “No”

1. **State your position.** Tell the other person how you feel about something, or give your answer to a request that you do something (e.g., “No, you can’t borrow my book”). Speak with a strong, confident tone of voice.
2. **State your reason.** Tell the other person the reason for your position, request, or feelings (e.g., “I need to use it myself” or “I already promised that someone else could use it”).
3. **Be understanding (if appropriate).** Let the other person know that you understand their point of view, request, or feelings (e.g., “I know you really need to use it, and I wish there was something I could do to help”).

Making Requests or Asserting Rights

1. Tell the other person the problem or situation to be changed.
2. Say how you might change the situation or solve the problem. Inform the other person what you would like them to do or what you think (asserting rights), or ask for a favor.

How to Say It

Following these tips will help you be more assertive by using the right nonverbal skills.

1. **Eye Contact:** Look directly into the person’s eyes. Don’t look away from the person you are talking to or down at the floor.
2. **Facial Expression:** Be certain that your facial expressions match what you are saying (for example, don’t smile while telling someone you’re angry).
3. **Body position/posture:** Face the person to whom you are speaking, and stand up straight. Slouching will make the person think you don’t believe what you’re saying.
4. **Distance:** Stand a comfortable distance from the person you are talking with (generally about three feet).

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Procedure for Saying “No”

Step 1: State your position. Tell the other person how you feel about something, or give your answer to the request (e.g., “No, you can’t borrow my book”).

Step 2: State your reason. Tell the other person the reason for your position, request, or feelings (e.g., “I need to use it myself” or “I already promised someone else that he/she could use it”).

Step 3: Be understanding if appropriate. Let the other person know that you understood their point of view, request, or feelings (e.g., “I know you really need to use it”).

3. Have students practice using the assertive situations and responses listed on the board. Students can either practice as a class or break into small groups. The focus should be on verbal assertive skills.
4. Provide feedback to students practicing saying “no” in order to shape their behavior and help them improve their ability to refuse requests.
5. Provide positive reinforcement to students for effective performance of refusal skills (e.g., “I like how you maintained eye contact” or “You did a good job being clear”).



Making Requests and Asserting Rights

1. Review and demonstrate verbal assertive skills for making requests and asserting rights. This consists of a two-step procedure (refer students to the **Student Guide** on page 79).

Procedure for Making Requests and Asserting Rights

Step 1: Describe the problem or situation to be changed.

Tell the other person the problem or situation which needs to be changed (e.g., “I left my backpack at home and don’t have anything to write with.”).

Step 2: Make the request to correct the problem or change the situation.

Tell the other person what you would like him/her to do or what you think (asserting rights), or ask for a favor (e.g., “Could I borrow some paper and a pen?”).

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2. Remind students to use a confident tone to reinforce their message.
 3. Provide an opportunity for students to practice (either as a class or in small groups).
 4. Give feedback to students practicing requests in order to shape their behavior and help them be more skilled when asking favors or making requests. Point out effective use of request skills and tone of voice.

C ▶ **Expressing Feelings**

- BR** ▶
A ▶
1. Explain and demonstrate the use of “I” statements for expressing feelings (positive or negative). Some examples include: “I really like you.” “I’m really angry with you.”

Common “I” Statement Stems

- I feel...
 - I want...
 - I don’t like...
 - I can...
 - I will...
 - I agree...
2. Have students practice expressing their feelings using “I” statements (either as a class or in small groups).
 3. Provide feedback to students practicing “I” statements in order to shape their behavior and help them be more skilled when expressing feelings.

F ▶ **Nonverbal Assertive Skills (15 minutes)**

C ▶
BR ▶ Discuss, demonstrate, and practice the use of appropriate nonverbal assertive skills.

1. Tell students that being assertive involves both a verbal message and the appropriate nonverbal behavior.

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2. Explain and demonstrate the use of nonverbal assertive skills (see the box below for a description of important nonverbal assertive skills).

Nonverbal Assertive Skills

Eye contact: Look directly into the eyes of the person to whom you are speaking.

Facial expression: Make sure your facial expression matches what you are saying.

Body position/posture: Face the person to whom you are speaking and stand up straight.

Distance: Stand a comfortable distance from the person to whom you are speaking (generally about three feet).

3. Have students practice using these nonverbal assertive skills in small groups using the examples of common assertive situations and those listed on the board. Use the same verbal assertive responses (what to say in each situation) practiced earlier, but this time focus on the nonverbal dimension (how it is said).
4. Provide feedback to students practicing nonverbal assertive skills in order to help them improve their effectiveness.
5. Provide positive reinforcement to students for effective use of nonverbal assertive skills in order to increase their confidence.
6. Assign behavioral homework in applying the verbal and nonverbal assertive behaviors covered in this unit.
7. Encourage application of these assertive skills to deal with everyday situations warranting an assertive response.

F▶ **Resisting Peer Pressure to Use Drugs (20 minutes)**

Assertive skills and the ability to say “no” – even when being pressured – are needed especially during high-risk situations.

Identify situations in which students are likely to experience peer pressure to use drugs, and create a set of assertive responses that are likely to be the most effective with these situations. Then demonstrate and practice the application of general refusal skills to situations in which students may experience peer pressure to use drugs.

Identifying High Risk Situations and Assertive Responses

1. Ask students for examples of high risk situations in which they have felt pressured or encouraged to smoke, drink, or use drugs.
2. List these on the board.
3. Take a vote to determine which of these are the most important (common and/or difficult) situations to learn how to handle. Put a check mark next to the ten most important.

**Refusal Techniques:
Ways of Saying "No"**

Simple No: "No," or "No, thanks."

Tell It Like It Is: "No, thanks. I don't smoke."

Give an Excuse: "No, thanks. I'm in a hurry right now. I've got to go."

The Big Stall: "No, thanks. Maybe later."

Change the Subject: Say "no" and start talking about something else.
"No, thanks. Hey, did you see the game last night?"

Broken Record: Repeat "no" over and over, or do variations on your "no" response.
"No, thanks."
"No."
"No. I'm not interested."

Walk Away: Say "no" and walk away.

The Cold Shoulder: Ignore the other person.

Avoiding the Situation: Stay away from any situation where you are likely to be pressured to smoke.

"No."
No, thanks. I don't smoke."

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4. Ask the class to develop as many assertive responses to these situations as possible. Review Ways of Saying “No” in the **Student Guide** (page 81).

Refusal Techniques: Ways of Saying “No”

| <i>Technique</i> | <i>Example</i> |
|------------------------|--|
| Simple “no” | “No.” or “No, thanks.” |
| Tell it like it is | “No, thanks. I don’t smoke.” |
| Give an excuse | “No, thanks. I’m in a hurry right now. I’ve got to go.” |
| The big stall | “No, thanks. Maybe later.” |
| Change the subject | Say no and start talking about something else. “No, thanks. Hey, did you see the game last night?” |
| Broken record | Repeat “no” over and over, or give variations on your no response. “No, thanks.” “No.” “No. I’m not interested.” |
| Walk away | Say “no” and walk away. |
| The cold shoulder | Ignore the other person. |
| Avoiding the situation | Stay away from any situation where you are likely to be pressured to smoke |

5. Take a vote on which method students think would work the best and write these down on the board next to each situation.



Demonstrating and Practicing Drug Refusal Skills

1. Explain and model the use of assertive and refusal skills for resisting peer pressure to use drugs. (As an alternative, have one or two student volunteers demonstrate the use of these skills.) Focus on what to say (verbal assertive skills) and how to say it (nonverbal assertive skills).
2. Using a situation on the board or a scenario from **Appendix 1** (page 14.13), have students work in pairs or small groups to practice using these skills for refusing drug offers. If time permits, have students repeat the practice using a different scenario from either the board or Appendix 1.
3. Circulate and provide feedback and positive reinforcement on students' use of both verbal and nonverbal drug refusal skills.
4. Assign behavioral homework, encouraging students to use these skills in "real-life" situations in which they may be exposed to peer pressure to use drugs.



Developing Action Plans (10 minutes)

1. Have students formulate an Assertive Action Plan for the situations listed in the **Student Guide, Worksheet 24**, page 82 and for **Worksheet 25, Additional Action Plan**, page 83.
2. Discuss these Action Plans in class and practice them if time permits.

Here are some common situations that teenagers find themselves in. How would you handle them? What would you say or do?

| Situation | Your Response |
|--|---------------|
| 1. You are standing on a long lunch line. Someone cuts ahead of you in line. | _____ |
| 2. You are riding a train where smoking is not allowed. The person next to you lights up a cigarette. | _____ |
| 3. You are in a friend's house and they're drinking beer. Your friends offer you some. You don't want any. | _____ |
| 4. Your friend wants to borrow your MP3 player. You don't want to lend it to your friend since you're afraid it will get broken. | _____ |
| 5. You're at a party where marijuana is being smoked. You do not want to smoke. Someone passes you a joint. | _____ |

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Describe situations that you think you may have to deal with by being assertive. Write down how you plan to handle them.

| Situation | Your Response |
|-----------|---------------|
| 1. _____ | _____ |
| 2. _____ | _____ |
| 3. _____ | _____ |
| 4. _____ | _____ |
| 5. _____ | _____ |

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Summary

- Assertive behavior involves acting in your own best interest, standing up for yourself, expressing yourself honestly and openly, and/or exercising your own rights without denying the rights of others.
- There are many advantages to being assertive, including increasing the likelihood of getting what you want and personal satisfaction.
- Assertiveness involves both verbal and nonverbal assertive behaviors.
- Assertiveness can be acquired by practicing the skills covered in this unit.
- Peer pressure to smoke, drink, or use drugs can be handled by using the assertive skills covered in this unit.

Summary Page

Appendix 1: Scripted Practice

Peer Pressures to Smoke Cigarettes and Ways to Deal with Them

1. Some of your friends are hanging out. One holds out a pack of cigarettes and says, “Hey, want a smoke?” Others take a cigarette and light up, except you don’t want to.
2. You’re out with friends and practically all the people you’re with are smoking. Some of them pressure you to smoke.
3. You’re in a large group outside the school and everyone’s smoking. You sort of feel out of place. Your friends ask if you want a cigarette.
4. You’re eating pizza outside at your friends’ house. Someone in your group starts passing a pack of cigarettes around.
5. After a basketball game, some of your teammates start to smoke cigarettes. They hand you a cigarette and tell you to light up.

Possible Ways to Handle the Situation Using Refusal Skills

1. Make up an excuse. For example, say you have to leave.
2. Tell the truth – that you don’t want to smoke and hope they’ll understand.
3. Change the subject. For example, offer to split something to eat with someone who is smoking.
4. Stall for time. Say: “No thanks, I don’t feel like having one now.”

Vocabulary

Word

Definition

assertive

calmly and firmly standing up for your rights without infringing on others'

aggressive

acting in a hostile manner that may infringe on others' rights

passive

accepting without objection or resistance, not responding or reacting to something you feel strongly about