

## CWS Anxiety Workshop

### **Anxiety & Relationships**

Relationships and interactions with other people are often a major cause of anxiety or a major factor that maintains anxiety. There are some important things you can do to maintain healthy relationships and thereby diminish and control anxiety.

#### 1. Boundaries and Assertiveness

Many people feel anxious because they are trying to have **EVERYONE** like them, or at least not be upset with them. This often leads to not defining your boundaries, the primary example being an unwillingness to say “no.” People then feel overwhelmed and pressured to meet all the demands others make of them, and often come to secretly resent these demands and feel others are taking advantage of them. However, if you don’t tell other people where your boundaries are, what you will and won’t put up with, then it is only natural that people will continue to make requests of you or do things that you don’t like.



**PEOPLE ARE NOT MIND READERS!**

#### **"What is assertiveness?"**

- A set of behaviors which allows you to express needs, set limits, and state feelings.
- An attitude that acknowledges your own needs and the needs of others. People who are assertive can communicate their own needs and listen to what others are saying as well.
- An approach to life that allows you to retain or regain control over your own life, and can lead to increased self-esteem.
- A right to make decisions about your own life.

### **Assertiveness is NOT aggression**

Aggressive people force others to meet their needs by using unpleasant means such as shouting, physical roughness, manipulation, or threats. In contrast, assertiveness is being able to express feelings, ask for something, or set limits without demanding results or intimidating people.

### **You can learn to be more assertive**

It just takes time and practice. As you practice basic assertiveness skills, you will develop confidence in yourself. Some situations are more difficult than others, so you may want to begin practicing assertiveness skills in easier situations. It may be easier to assert yourself with strangers than with your supervisor at work or with your family. For example, while waiting in line and someone cuts in front of you, you can assertively say, "I believe I was next."

### **Saying "No."**

- I'd rather not.
- I can't do that right now.
- I'm afraid I have to decline.
- Sorry, but no.
- Thanks for asking, but no.

### **Asking for what you need**

Use "I" statements to communicate needs. "You-statements" blame others, put them on the defensive, and cause communication to be blocked. "I statements" provide a means to express a feeling, thought, or request.

I feel **(emotion)** when you **(behavior)**. I would prefer that you **(alternate behavior)**.

Different situations will require variations on the "I" statements. Sometimes only one or two parts of the "I" statement may be necessary to clearly express yourself.

Some examples:

- I need to be alone for a while.
- I need help with these math problems. Would you be able to help me sometime?
- Please be quiet when the professor is speaking because I can't hear her when you are talking.

- I want to go home now.
- I would prefer that you not touch me.
- I need to talk to you.

**Keep these in mind when being assertive.**

- **Listen.** Being willing and able to listen to other people and hear what they are really saying communicates that you consider their point of view as well as your own.
- **Eye contact.** Looking at someone when speaking communicates a stronger message.
- **Body language.** Standing or sitting up straight when speaking communicates that you mean it.
- **Timing.** Choosing the right time to deliver your message will make it more effective.

## 2. Dealing With Your Feelings

Many people feel anxious because they struggle to identify and express their emotions. They are often accustomed to denying their feelings and may worry that expressing their feelings, which can seem overwhelming to them, will make them “go crazy.” But, it is actually the suppression of feelings that can lead to many mental health problems, including anxiety.

### **Identify feelings**

- Identify and label the feeling you are experiencing. For example, do you feel angry, frustrated, hurt, bored, embarrassed, stressed, or anxious? It may be difficult at first to identify and label your feelings if you are accustomed to pushing feelings away.
- Select the primary emotion that you feel. Some emotions mask other, deeper emotions. For example, some people will feel angry at the surface, but feel hurt or scared underneath.
- Accurately identify the intensity of the emotion you feel. For example, anger can be felt on a continuum from irritation to mad to furious.
- If you struggle to name feelings, take a look at this brief feeling list:

Affectionate	Competent	Needy	Jealous	Lovable
Afraid	Playful	Bored	Courageous	Proud
Curious	Tender	Uncertain	Unfulfilled	Grateful
Confident	Inferior	Indecisive	Cherished	Calm
Joyful	Respected	Eager	Dejected	Embarrassed
Fulfilled	Special	Lonely	Secure	Guilty

## **Express feelings**

- Feelings are not good or bad, right or wrong. Labeling them this way often is why people feel they need to suppress them. It is what you do with those feelings, your BEHAVIOR, that can be healthy or problematic.
- Family background often influences how people deal with feelings. Was it okay to cry in your family? Was it okay to express feelings other than “happy?” Often if parents are overly critical, or set unrealistic or perfectionistic standards, children will not feel free to express themselves because they are trying to conform to their parents and get parental approval.
- Headaches, high blood pressure, muscle tension, and a host of other physical issues are often the result of suppressed feelings.
- Remember to use “I” language
  - I felt hurt and embarrassed that you did not introduce me to your friend.
  - I feel pressured to have sex with you and I'm not ready for that.
  - I felt left out when all of you went out for ice cream and didn't invite me.
  - I feel annoyed and frustrated when you play your stereo when I'm trying to study.
- A few ways to express feelings:
  - Talk to others about what you feel
  - Write about what you feel
  - Watch a movie, listen to a song, read poetry or some other artistic stimulus to evoke and let out emotions like sadness
  - Discharge anger (hit a pillow/punching bag, scream into a pillow, yell in the car, chopping wood, exercising)

## **Focus on the positive**

Anxiety can often come from people continually focusing on negatives, on how things are going wrong. Focus on how things are good and what is going well. Accept compliments (this can be hard for some people). Tell someone you love him or her. Share your appreciation of others and yourself.

- I did well on that.
- I enjoy your company.
- I really appreciated your help.
- Thank you! (when given a compliment)

### 3. Healthy Relationships

Assertiveness and dealing with feelings are key components of having healthy relationships. Some other considerations include:

#### **What characteristics make up a healthy relationship?**

- Acceptance
- Respect
- Trust & Support
- Communication
- Compassion/Forgiveness
- Dependability
- Freedom
- Honesty
- Patience
- Affection
- Sense of humor

#### **Warning signs (of unhealthy relationships)**

- Jealousy
- Controlling Behaviors
- Quick involvement
- Unfair Expectations
- Isolation
- Blames others
- Verbally Abusive
- History of Battering
- Force Used in Sex
- Threats of Violence
- Force used in arguments
- Overly sensitive
- Substance Abuse/Addiction

