

DOROTA SAWICKA



# THE ROAD TO ASSERTIVENESS

part 2

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# INTRODUCTION

Assertiveness is the ability to express one's own thoughts, feelings, and needs directly while respecting the rights and feelings of others. It is the capacity to express oneself confidently and decisively without violating others' boundaries and while maintaining self-respect. This skill is crucial for building healthy and satisfying relationships with others.

Assertiveness is often seen as a balance between aggression and submission, where a person can express their opinion without feeling pressured to impose their needs or to conform to others. The ability to communicate assertively can help in managing conflicts, expressing one's views, and ensuring that others treat us with greater respect. Practicing assertiveness can improve relationships with others and enhance self-acceptance and self-worth. It is worth developing this skill through training, practice, and awareness of one's needs and boundaries.

To continue developing assertiveness, one can participate in workshops, training sessions, read motivational literature, and practice assertive behaviors in daily life. Building self-confidence, the ability to express emotions in a controlled manner, and awareness of one's desires and boundaries are also important. Assertiveness can bring many benefits, such as improved interpersonal relationships, greater understanding of oneself and others, and increased self-esteem. It is worth striving to perfect this skill to achieve harmony in communication and relationships with others.

# **Assertiveness. Expressing your thoughts and feelings decisively and consistently revealing your own emotions.**

Systematic desensitization is a technique used in cognitive-behavioral therapy aimed at reducing anxiety intensity and improving the ability to be assertive. It involves gradually and controlled exposure to stimuli or situations that provoke anxiety, with the goal of gradually desensitizing oneself to the anxiety response.

Here are a few steps to take in systematic desensitization:

1. Identify anxiety-provoking stimuli: Identify personal situations where you feel anxious and avoid assertive behavior. These might include situations where you need to say "no" or express your opinion.
2. Create a hierarchy of anxiety: On a list of stimuli that trigger anxiety related to assertiveness, organize them starting from those that cause the least anxiety to those that cause the most.

3. Gradually expose yourself to the stimuli: Start with the first item on the list and systematically expose yourself to it. Initially, do this for a longer period but in a moderate form. For example, if you're afraid of assertively refusing to work overtime, start by making a small refusal or taking an additional break during the day. Gradually increase the intensity and duration of exposure to the stimulus.
4. Stay with the stimulus until the anxiety decreases: When exposing yourself to the stimulus, try to maintain the situation long enough for the anxiety to diminish. Stay in the situation until you feel the anxiety shifting or decreasing. This will help you realize that anxiety is temporary and can be endured.
5. Remember relaxation and breathing techniques: While exposing yourself to anxiety-provoking stimuli, use relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, appropriate stretching, or meditation. This will help you stay calm and minimize anxiety.
6. Repeat the steps for subsequent stimuli: After achieving comfort with the first stimulus on the list, continue working with the next stimuli. Gradually expose yourself



to increasingly challenging situations until you achieve greater assertiveness.

Systematic desensitization may require time and effort, but regular exposure to anxiety-provoking stimuli and the gradual fading of the anxiety response can bring long-term benefits. It's important to be patient and kind to yourself, as everyone develops at their own pace. In cases of significant anxiety or difficulty applying this technique on your own, it may be helpful to consult a therapist who can assist you in effectively implementing it.

# **Gradual exposure to situations that trigger negative emotions to control and reduce them.**

Exposure desensitization (exposure therapy) is a therapeutic technique used in cognitive-behavioral therapy that involves controlled and systematic exposure to stimuli or situations that cause anxiety or discomfort. The goal of exposure is to reduce anxiety or discomfort by gradually becoming accustomed to these stimuli.

Here are some key points to consider during exposure desensitization:

1. Creating a hierarchy of anxiety-inducing situations: At the beginning of therapeutic work, the therapist and patient jointly identify situations that cause the most anxiety for the patient. They then organize these situations in a hierarchy based on the level of anxiety they induce, starting with those that cause the least anxiety.
2. Exposure to anxiety-provoking stimuli: The patient gradually exposes themselves to the anxiety-provoking

stimuli from the hierarchy, starting with those that induce the least anxiety. In the case of specific phobias, this may involve direct exposure to fear-inducing objects or situations. For example, if a patient has a phobia of spiders, therapy may involve gradually exposing them to images of spiders and then observing live spiders.

3. Prolonged exposure to stimuli: It is important for the patient to remain exposed to a particular situation for a sufficiently long time so that the anxiety can gradually diminish. In some anxiety disorders, such as obsessive-compulsive disorder, exposure may last several hours.
4. Avoidance of avoidance strategies: During exposure to anxiety-provoking stimuli, the patient should try to avoid engaging in avoidance behaviors that serve to reduce anxiety. Such behaviors contribute to the maintenance of the anxiety disorder and prevent the realization that anxiety itself is not dangerous.
5. Use of relaxation techniques: The patient can use relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, muscle relaxation, or meditation, to help reduce tension and minimize anxiety during exposure.

Exposure can be conducted both in the therapist's office and in real-life situations. The therapist plays an important role in introducing the patient to the exposure technique, providing support, and monitoring progress.

It is important that exposure is conducted under the guidance of a therapist, as some situations can be dangerous or emotionally challenging. The therapist will help tailor the exposure program to individual needs and assess the effectiveness of the technique.