**Assertiveness Skills**

* Practice your assertiveness skills every day.
* They are important whether you tend to be on the shy side or aggressive side, anxious side or angry side, or people tending to not take you seriously or seeming fearful of you.
* Focus on practicing one skill at the time – focusing on several will not improve your skills. Consider tracking your efforts to keep you focused on practicing the skill.
* You can practice in every-day situations even where assertiveness is not needed (e.g., assertively requesting paper bags when the grocery store bagger asks; saying “thank you” assertively; giving yourself good self-messages assertively in the mirror)

1) Maintain **eye contact**, but don’t force it. Look in their eyes, and position yourself so that they can naturally look in your eyes. If eye contact is really stressful for you, look at the bridge of their nose. If they won’t look at you, look where their eyes should have been.

2) Keep your **eyes level with their eyes**.

* If your eyes are higher you will come across as intimidating and will activate the emotional processing centers. They may respond without internalizing.
* If your eyes are below their eyes, they will take most things as something to consider, but not as important. It makes people feel safe, so do this deliberately when not wanting to be assertive and wanting to just be available and supportive (e.g., talking with someone who just went through trauma).
* You may need to stand with legs further apart, lean forward, stand or sit up more straight, or use other ways to make the eyes level.
* Note that tall individuals tend to make people feel intimidated, and can come across as “mean” for that reason. People react this way without knowing the cause – so check yourself when it comes to your reaction to tall individuals, and be aware of it if you are tall (or wearing high heels - I usually take my high heels off when seeing shorter clients).

3) **Square up - times two**. Make sure your head is positioned straight forwards from your body. Position yourself so that the other person’s head naturally squares up. If you can’t, or the other person doesn’t square up this way, then don’t worry about it.

4) **Short statements.** Use few words. Once they have understood your initial message, you can use more words.

5) **No fidgeting** or hands close to your face. If you tend to, find an incompatible behavior to do (e.g., grab your pant pockets).

6) **Go slightly down in tone** at the end of the statement. Our tone goes up when we get nervous. The tone going up at the end of a sentence makes it a question. Going slightly down helps you not go up.

7) **Skip the emotions.** Avoid putting emotion in the statement (e.g., anger, hurt). This is hard, but… As long as you focus on any of the 6 steps above, you most likely will naturally leave the emotion out of it.