

# Assertiveness and Managing Conflict

Julie English NHSBT

## Definition

- **What is Assertiveness?**
  - A “mid-point”

**Passive – Assertive – Aggressive**

## **Assertive behaviour allows us to;**

- **Refuse requests.**
- **Ask for favours and make requests.**
- **Express positive and negative feelings.**
- **Initiate, continue and terminate general conversations.**

**Lazarus AA, Behaviour Therapy & Beyond.  
(McGraw-Hill 1971)**

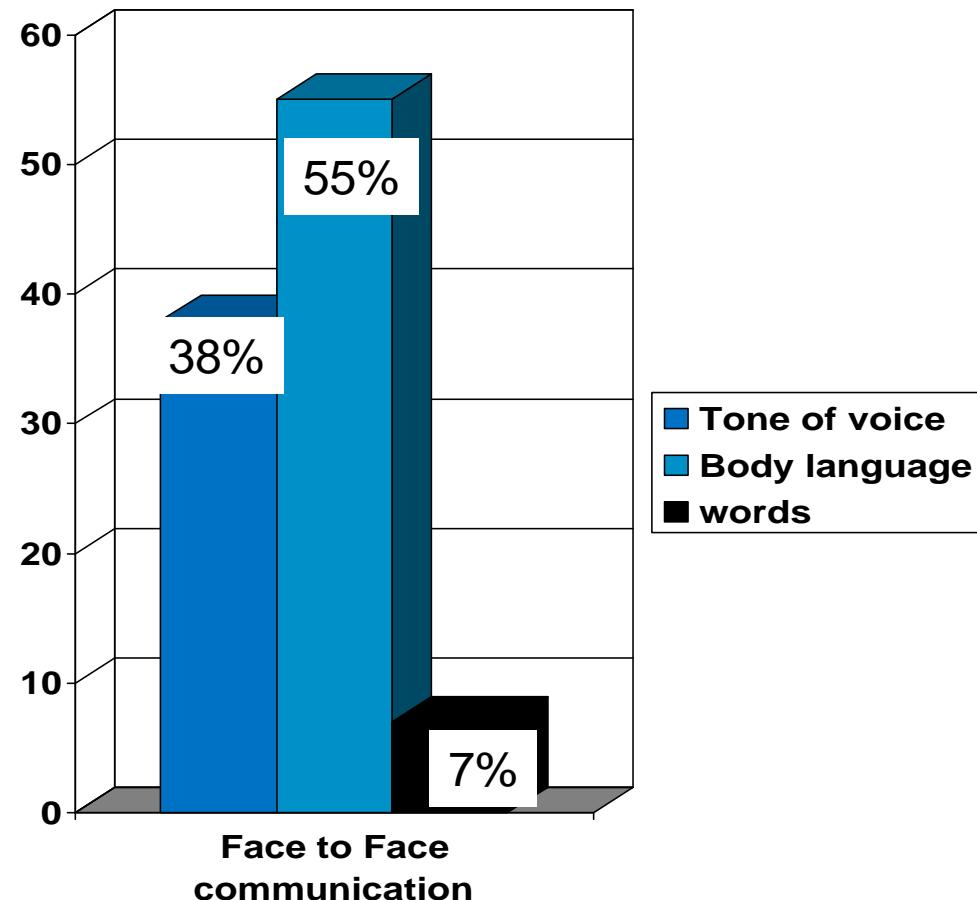
## ***Why be assertive?***

**To help individuals to:**

- Ensure personal rights are not violated
- Deal effectively unreasonable requests from others
- Recognise the personal rights of others
- Change the behaviour of others toward them
- Avoid unnecessary aggressive conflicts

## Modes of communication

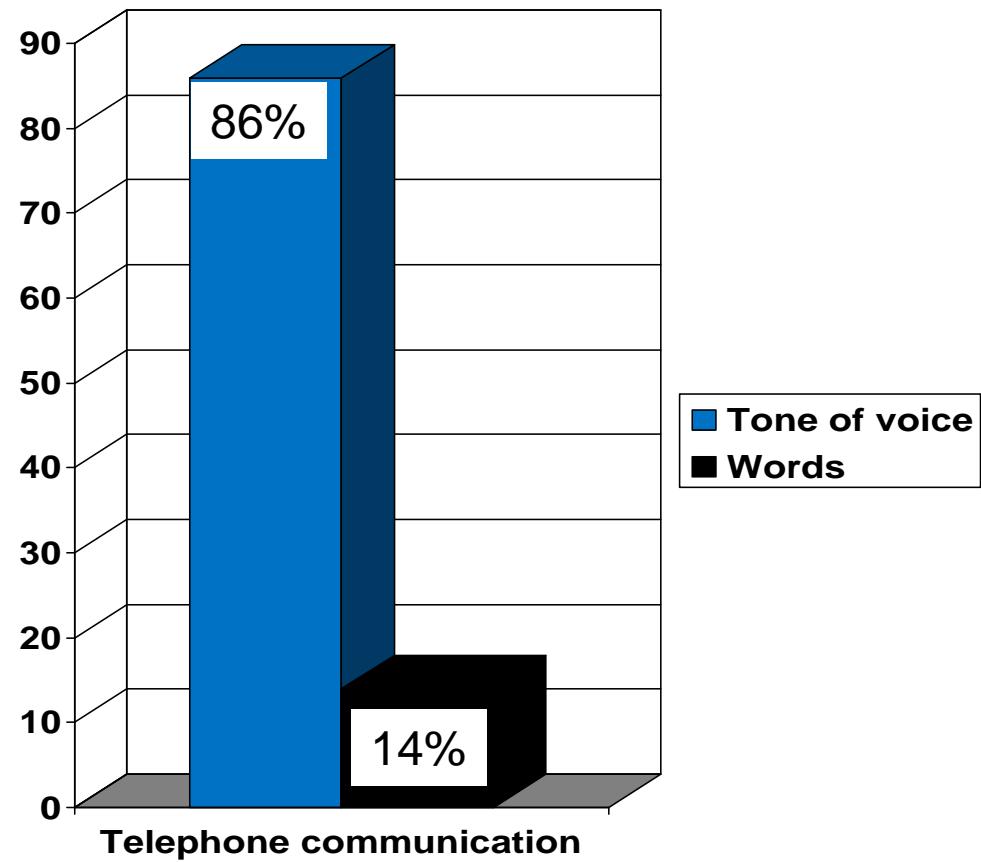
- Face to face
  - In a **face to face** situation it takes **60** seconds to make an initial impression ...



Mehrabian, A. (1981) Silent messages: Implicit communication of emotions and attitudes. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth

## Modes of communication

- Telephone
  - On the telephone it takes just 10 seconds to make a good or bad impression!



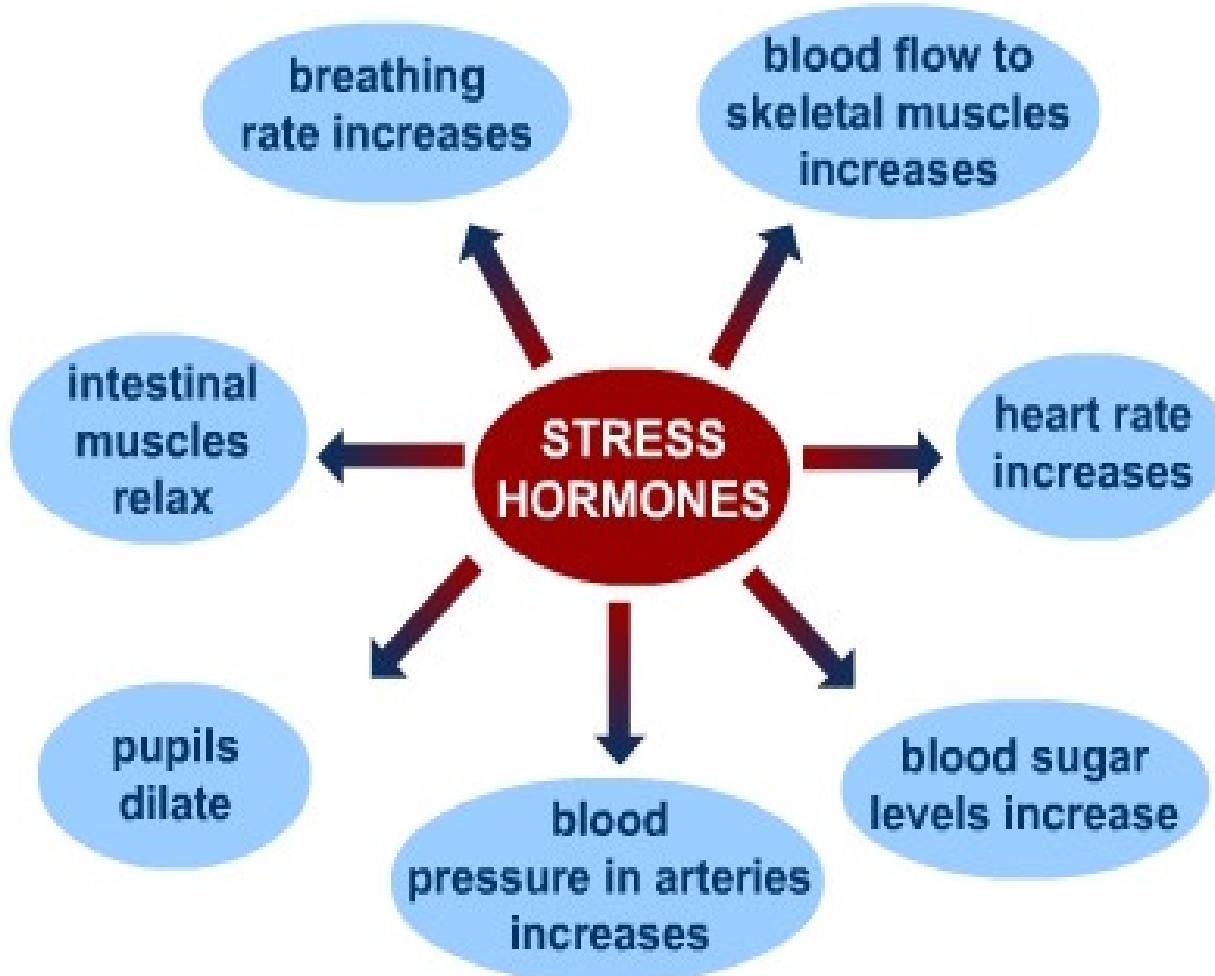
# Response

- **Initial response can be emotional**
  - Irrational, anger, fear, excitement, love, fight or flight etc ...
- **Rational responses are slower**
  - Calm, relaxed.
  - Involves higher brain function

# Pause

- **We need to be able to**
  - Take a mental breath
  - Calm the situation down
  - Take control
- **Rather than succumbing to a “knee-jerk” response.**

## Not always easy ...



## Good communications skills will help ...

- **Phone manner**

- How you answer the phone **Very** important – sets the mood.

- **Inflection and tone of voice**

- Critical

- **Pacing**

- To help control the conversation

- **Volume**

- Beware background noise that may make you or the caller have to raise their voice

## Defusing conflict – when dealing with conflict we need to:

- Detect early signs of escalation
- Employ self control
- Focus on a solution
- Use active listening
- Signal non-aggression
- Empathise

## ***Detect early signs of aggression***

- Remember fight/flight symptoms
- Lack of basic courtesy
- Interruptions and over-talking
- Pitch of voice starts to rise
- Volume increases
- There may be vulgar / abusive  
or threatening language

## ***Employ self control***

- Control your own fight / flight response
- Take a deep breath (don't hold it!)
- Do not get pulled into a conflict
- Do not 'bite' in response to
  - personal abuse
  - or threatening language
- Retain your state of
  - independence
- Maintain your professionalism!

## ***Focus on a solution***

- Move the debate on to the future and the solution, rather than dwell on past occurrences
- Involve the caller in finding a solution
- If possible, offer choices or options to the caller
- If they have asked for something that you cannot provide, tell them what you can do instead

## ***Use active listening***

- **Focus your attention on them**
  - don't just spend the time when they're talking composing your reply
- **Use verbal prompts such as “I see” and “I understand” rather than “OK”**
- **Be patient & don't interrupt**
- **Ask open questions (when, where, how etc) to enable you to fully understand the situation**
- **Summarise your understanding of the situation back to the caller when they have finished talking.**

## *Signal non-aggression*

- Remember, the caller, cannot see you,
  - so it's best to:
- Talk clearly at a steady pace
- Keep your tone of voice calm and relaxed (inflection)
- Avoid interrupting,
  - show what they have to say is important to you
- Don't be condescending
- If you need to address their conduct – be **ASSERTIVE**

## **Empathise**

- **It is about being able to see and understand another's viewpoint, putting yourself in their shoes**
- **It is not to be confused with sympathy**
- **It is not about feeling sorry for someone or pretending to feel sorry for them**
- **It is a good way of building rapport**
  - 'I am sorry that you are disappointed/ unhappy with...'
  - 'I can hear that this has upset you'
  - 'I understand how you must feel about this'

## *Use the correct language*

- **Try not to be negative**
  - Try not to say “Unfortunately ...” or “I’m afraid ...”
- **Don’t apologise**
  - or say “can’t”, explain the facts and give information, “I’m unable to because ..., Offer a solution
- **If you don’t think you can help**
  - Suggest someone who can, if you can, put them in touch rather than giving them the run-around
- **Empathy**
  - ‘I understand your position, however...’

***Don't forget to thank them ...***

- Thank you for bringing this to my attention'
- 'Thank you for giving me the chance to put things right'
- 'Thank you for being so patient'

## ***Being Assertive***



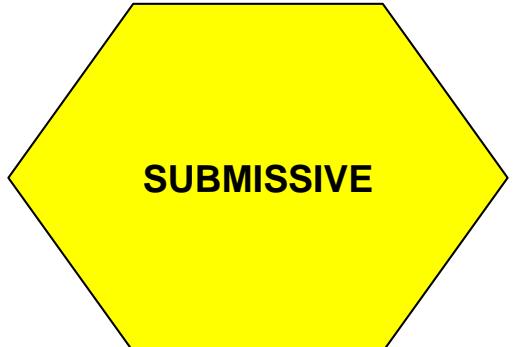
Ineffective performance  
Accepting abuse  
Mumbling  
Apologising for what you are doing



Clear, steady and firm speech  
Remain calm  
Point out issues without triggering aggression  
Professional



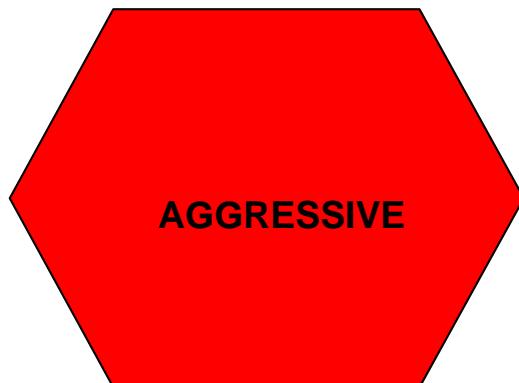
Giving orders  
Raising voice  
Admonishing  
Hanging up  
Failure to resolve



SUBMISSIVE



ASSERTIVE



AGGRESSIVE

## *Typical statements*

“I’m sorry but it’s not my fault, it’s hospital policy...”

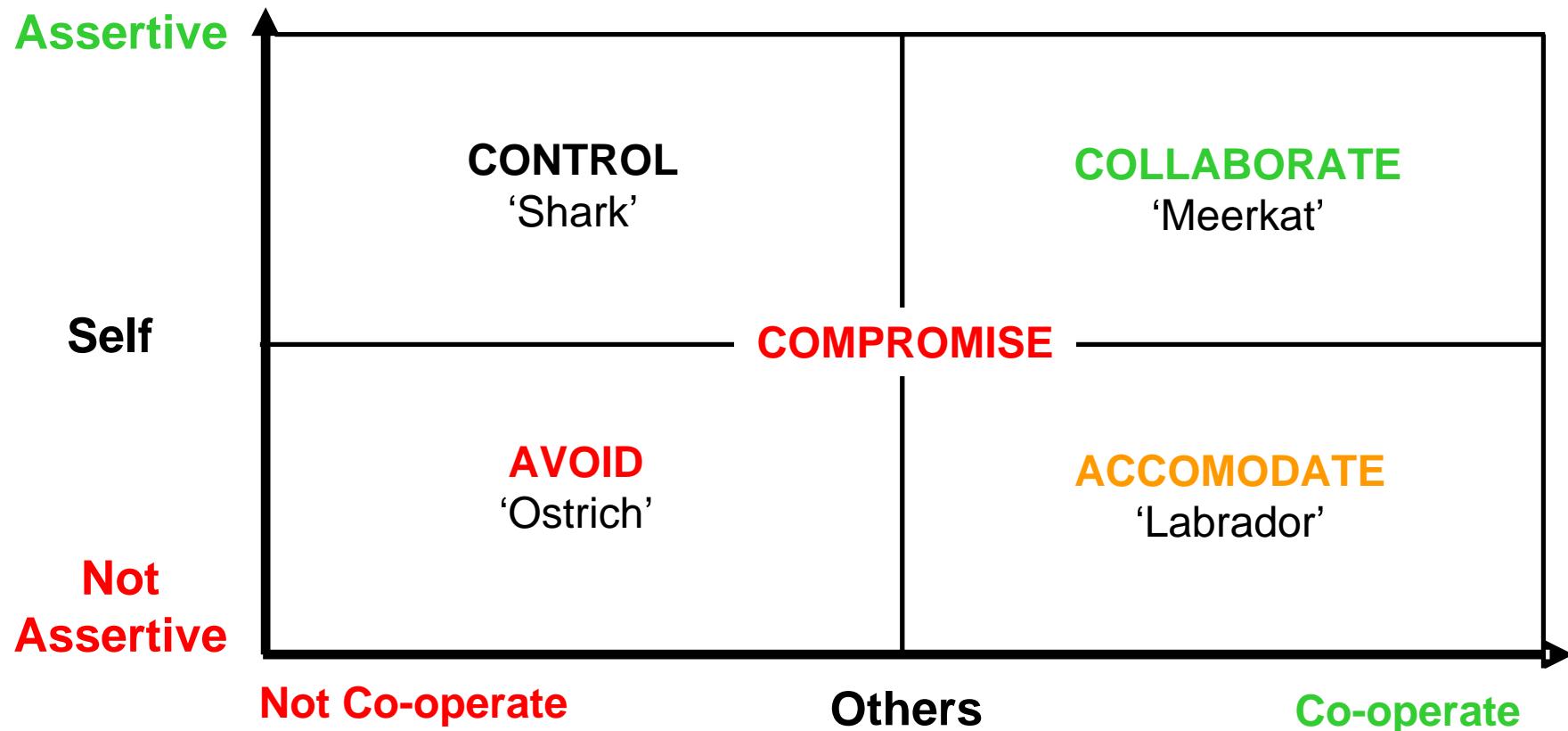
“I can see that this is important to you and I really want to help, but your shouting is making it difficult for me to do that. If you can stay calm, I will do my best to help”.

“We don’t tolerate that sort of request doctor, so you’ll have to calm down or I will terminate the call”

## **Remember...**

- **DON'T SAY 'SORRY' FOR ENFORCING POLICIES / PROCEDURES**
  - but you can say sorry about how you've made them feel.
- **NEVER apologise for doing your job!**
- **DON'T SAY 'CALM DOWN' – try instead 'I can hear that you are upset. Let's stay calm.'**
- **BE POSITIVE and proactive**
- **KNOW what you want and understand what they want**

## The Dual Concern Model



## Final Activity

- Non verbal signals, posture and demeanour can influence the way we are perceived, but also ...



- [http://www.ted.com/talks/amy\\_cuddy\\_your\\_body\\_languag...](http://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_languag...)