Saying ‘No’
Many people find it difficult to say ‘No’. It can help if you remember that you are not responsible for the reactions of other adults and that you are not being selfish. Saying ‘yes’ when you want to say ‘no’ results in short-term gain (for the other person) but long-term pain (for you).

Here are some tips to saying ‘No’:
- Match your body language to your words, otherwise your message will be confusing
- Be clear, direct and honest. You will feel better about yourself in the long run rather than resentful
- Be firm, recognising your own limits and priorities
- Acknowledge the other person’s feelings whilst holding your ground
- You don’t have to say ‘sorry’ or give elaborate explanations
- If possible, you might be able to offer a compromise

It is the request you are rejecting, not the person

Like any new skill you learn, it will take some practice to find the assertiveness techniques that work best for you. Start practising in situations that feel safe and then take on more difficult ones as you become more confident.

Assertiveness and EAP

If you would like help to increase your self-belief and learn the skills of assertiveness, we can help. You may also be interested in our leaflet Assertiveness: Knowing and believing in yourself

EAP: take a step forward
01225 82 5960 / 4484
Very few people are born with natural skills in assertiveness. Most of us pick up our skills as we go through life, and some skills will be easier to learn than others. So don’t worry if assertiveness isn’t your strong point – these are valuable lifeskills that are never too late to learn.

What is assertiveness?

Assertiveness is a way of relating to each other and ourselves with a positive attitude, believing that we matter as much as they do. Unlike passive or aggressive behaviour, assertiveness enables us to express our feelings and needs in a direct, honest, appropriate and respectful way.

You may recognise some of these patterns:

- Passive behaviour: I lose, you win
- Aggressive behaviour: I win, you lose
- Assertive behaviour: I win, you win

Assertiveness skills

Assertive body language
Our body language always has an impact on others and communicates much more than we realise.

- Breathe deeply, allow your shoulders to open and hold your spine in a comfortable but upright manner
- Face the other person and make eye contact with them as you speak
- Listen carefully to them and what they have to say
- Keep your voice as calm as possible
- If you feel yourself blushing or shaking, just focus on your breath and feeling strong in your body

Using ‘I’ statements
‘I’ statements help you to hold on to your ownership of your thoughts and feelings, which no one can take away from you. A good way of doing this uses the following formula:

“I felt/feel............ when you .......... because ...............”

An example of this is:

“I felt upset when you spoke to me so abruptly because it didn’t feel like you were respecting me.”

The ‘broken record’ technique
This technique can be very powerful, especially if you are a quietly-spoken person, or if you have to assert yourself with someone who is very articulate or who ignores you.

Here is an example of the technique in action:

Sarah: “Marie, can you work my shift for me tomorrow?”
Marie: “I won’t be able to as I’ve made plans for tomorrow”
Sarah: “But I really want tomorrow off, can’t you do it just this time?”
Marie: “No, I won’t be able to as I’ve made plans for tomorrow”
Sarah: “I thought you were my friend.”
Marie: “I am your friend but I’ve made plans for tomorrow”

Keep repeating your point, calmly and without having to justify your decision. Don’t be put off by clever arguments or being manipulated into feeling like you’re being awkward. This is a simple tactic that really works.