

CRITICISM -- THE GREAT INHIBITOR

GOALS:

- To discover how criticism blocks assertive behaviour.
- To work on increasing assertiveness through behaviour rehearsal.

RATIONALE:

Fear of criticism is possibly one of the strongest inhibitors blocking self-assertive behaviour. It feeds into our fear of rejection, isolation and guilt. Learning how to respond directly and honestly to other people's expectations and manipulation will help us to develop an active role in different interpersonal situations and will decrease feelings of anxiety.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

Flipchart, markers; for each participant a handout of *The A B C D Techniques for Handling Criticism*.

METHOD:

Warm up: Critical Statements

Ask each participant to volunteer a critical statement to which it would be difficult for them to respond. Flipchart these statements. For example:

You are selfish.
How could you ever pick those colours?

Statements should be short and specific. Then set these aside temporarily while the group learns four techniques.

Theory:

Discuss and demonstrate the four techniques described in the Theory Box. Explain that although they are taught individually for the sake of clarity, they are often used together. One can agree and then clarify in one statement. Used individually, they may sound stilted or artificial. It can be compared to learning French. It may sound stilted at the beginning but with practice, it becomes more fluid.

Explain each technique, give examples and then have a short group discussion to be sure participants understand.

Exercise: Using the A B C D's

Divide participants into smaller groups of four to six. Distribute among the groups the critical statements previously flipcharted. Encourage small groups to practice applying *The A B C D Techniques for Handling Criticism*.

Note: A small discussion on Assertiveness may be helpful before starting problem-solving. A reminder is given that an assertive statement is direct, honest and an appropriate expression of feelings and thoughts. It's neither blaming nor critical.

In the total group, participants discuss the exercise using such questions as:

- Were you able to use the different techniques?
- What more did you need?
- What were some of your responses to the more difficult statements?

EVALUATION:

CREDIT:

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THE A B C D TECHNIQUES FOR HANDLING CRITICISM

ACKNOWLEDGE

A skill that teaches acceptance of our errors and faults without having to apologize.

Example:

Person 1: "It was careless of you to leave the file out overnight."

Person 2: "Yes, I was careless. I'll certainly try to take more care in future" (acknowledge).

BOUNDARIES

A skill that states our position and tells others how we expect to be treated. This is what I want and what I don't want.

Example:

Person 1: (said in front of co-workers) "You really are stupid to have left that file out!"

Person 2: "I'd like to discuss this with you for a moment privately." (draws person to a quiet place) "I can understand your frustration. It was careless of me to leave the file out. However, I'd appreciate it if you would tell me in private and also drop the name calling." (boundaries)

CLARIFYING

A skill that teaches the usefulness of criticism as a source for gathering information. The information can then be used to explore the criticism and problem solve.

Example:

Person 1: "The way files are handled around here is ridiculous!"

Person 2: "I don't understand what the problem is. What happened with the files? Give me some details."

DISAGREEING

A skill that allows us to diffuse aggressive statements. We establish limits and reinforce our right to set priorities.

Example:

Person 1: "You really are disorganized! This file was left out and it's your fault!"

Person 2: "I disagree. I find I'm quite organized and get my work done. However, if there has been a mistake and you want to discuss some changes, I'm available."