

Empowerment

Medical Patient Education Module

Empowerment. Self Will. Positive Thinking. Self-Worth. Fulfillment of Needs

Addicts often do not know how to get their needs met without using drugs. Because a person with substance dependence becomes so focused on obtaining and using drugs, he or she loses touch with other, more important needs. Over time some addicts fail even to recognize their other needs, much less meet them. The counselor will discuss this problem with the patient and determine if this is or ever was a problem. If this is a problem area, the counselor will encourage the patient to talk about the specific instances in which it occurs or has occurred.

Failures to recognize one's needs can be situational. Often the feeling that one does not have the right to have his or her own needs met can occur in a particular context. Examples include relational rights and privileges that stem from involvement with one's family or spouse.

The counselor should explain the following concepts to the patient and encourage the patient to practice assertive behavior. Assertive behavior is a skill that can be learned and maintained through frequent practice.

- *Assertion* is standing up for one's personal rights and expressing thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in direct, honest, and appropriate ways that do not violate another person's rights. The goals of assertion are communication and mutuality.
- *Non-assertion* amounts to violating one's own rights by failing to express honest feelings, thoughts, and beliefs and consequently allowing others to violate oneself. It also can occur through expressing one's thoughts and feelings in such an apologetic, diffident, or self-effacing manner that others easily can disregard them. Unfortunately, *assertion* is often, through conceptual error, confused with *aggression*.
- *Aggression* is standing up for one's personal rights and expressing thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in a way that often is dishonest, usually inappropriate, and always in violation of the rights of others. The goal is domination and winning by forcing the other person to lose. Winning is ensured by humiliating, degrading, or belittling one's opponent.

The counselor will encourage the patient to identify personal needs that are not being satisfactorily met and, if appropriate, help the patient to identify and try out the assertive behaviors to help get the needs met. Giving patients the opportunity to rehearse repeatedly the assertive communications and behavior they want to employ in problematic situations in their lives often is a useful intervention.