

ASSERT YOURSELF!



Module Nine

How to Give and Receive Compliments Assertively

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Compliments

Being able to give and accept compliments is another assertiveness skill and one which is important in conversations and for building relationships and self esteem. As with all the skills we have looked at in this series of modules there is often some unhelpful thinking which stops us from being able to accept or give compliments. Or we may lack the skills needed to help us with this skill. This module will help you identify and unhelpful thoughts you have about compliments and also show you the steps to take to improve the way in which you accept and give compliments.

Accepting Compliments

Some people find it extremely difficult to accept compliments. Understandably there are times when it may feel uncomfortable; however, being able to accept other people's positive comments about our appearance, our work or some other aspect of ourselves is an important assertiveness and social skill.

How do you Cope with Receiving Compliments?

There are a number of unassertive ways of responding to receiving compliments. These include:

- Ignoring the compliment and changing the topic.
- Disagreeing with the compliment or some part of the compliment. For example: "really, I don't like the colour of the dress at all."
- Dismissing or deflecting the compliment. For example "oh, this old thing, it's nothing special."
- Being sarcastic. For example "Yeah right, it's just gorgeous isn't it?"
- Nervous laughing or smiling
- Self-criticism

Take a minute and think of the last time you were complimented. See if you can remember how you reacted. Write this down.

Situation when complimented:

What I did:

Do you think your response was passive, assertive or aggressive? Read the descriptions below and see if you were right.

Passive Responses to Being Complimented

If you respond passively to being complimented you are likely to either ignore the compliment completely, or deflect or minimise the praise. You may feel very nervous and awkward and don't know how to respond at all. This can result in the other person also feeling awkward. You may then leave the social situation feeling embarrassed and your self esteem may suffer.

Aggressive Responses to Being Complimented

If you respond aggressively to being complimented you may become annoyed, angry or defensive, or disagree and respond sarcastically to the compliment. As with the passive response this may result in the other person feeling awkward.

Assertive Responses to Being Complimented

If you respond assertively you are able to accept the compliment in a positive way. The other person will not feel awkward and the interaction results in both of you feeling better about yourselves: you for accepting the compliment well and the other person for being

able to provide some positive feedback. When we can learn how to embrace positive feedback and accept compliments graciously, we open up the door for more positive thoughts and interactions, and we can actually start to BELIEVE them.

Then, when we hear our old patterns of self criticism, we can intentionally choose to believe the compliments we've been receiving instead.

Unhelpful thoughts associated with being complimented

As with the other behaviours we have looked at there are a number of unhelpful thoughts associated with not dealing well with compliments. Some of these are listed below.

- They don't really mean it. They are just trying to be nice.
- They are being smarmy.
- They must want something from me.
- If I accept a compliment it means I am being big-headed.
- If I accept a compliment they may think I am vain.
- It's too embarrassing to say something back.

Can you identify any other unhelpful thoughts that may stop you from responding to compliments assertively? List them below.

Responding Assertively to Compliments: More Helpful Thinking

Here are some more helpful and assertive thoughts to challenge any unhelpful thoughts you may have. Remember you can also use Thought Diaries and Behavioural Experiments (see Module 3) to help you come up with more helpful and assertive thoughts.

- The compliment may be genuine.
- Even if they are just trying to be nice that is still a positive thing and I can reply appropriately.
- If I don't accept the compliment I may make the other person feel awkward.
- Accepting the compliment may make the other person feel better too.
- Accepting a compliment gracefully doesn't mean I have to agree with it completely.
- If I start believing some compliments I may not feel so bad about myself.
- Accepting a compliment does not mean that I am going to become big-headed. If that were the case I would already be complimenting myself!
- People give compliments for a variety of reasons. Don't waste a lot of time wondering why someone gave you a compliment. Just appreciate the fact that someone took the time to say something nice to you!
- You are just as entitled to receive a compliment as anyone else.

See if you can think of any other assertive thoughts about accepting compliments. If you have discovered some unhelpful thoughts write down some more helpful thoughts to challenge these.

Steps to responding to Compliments Assertively

1. Look at the other person. Sit or stand up straight. If you shrink back or don't look at the person it may seem as if you don't like them or don't believe them.
2. Listen to what he or she is saying.
3. Smile when receiving the compliment. A compliment is intended to make you feel good. If you frown or look down or away the other person may be confused or uncomfortable.
4. Don't interrupt.

5. Say “Thanks,” or something that shows you appreciate what was said.
6. Remember to accept the compliment without trying to take the subject off yourself or feeling like you have to pay them back. This will make you feel more confident and let you grow to like yourself better.

Tips for Responding Assertively to Compliments

- As with all the skills you have been learning this one may require some practice. Try these steps in front of a mirror. Imagine someone says something nice, then say "Thank you. That means a lot to me."
- Don't change the topic without acknowledging the compliment.
- It's often good to use the compliment to further conversation. "Thanks! I found it in on eBay - it's amazing what you can get there." That way you've accepted the compliment and moved on to something about which you can both talk.

How to Give Compliments

It is also important to learn how to give compliments. Giving compliments is a way of showing that you have noticed and appreciated something about the person or the situation. People like being around others who are friendly and open. It also shows that you have the confidence to say what you really think, which as you remember is one of the cornerstones of being assertive. Give someone a compliment today!

Steps for Giving Compliments

- Think of the exact words you want to use before you give the compliment. It will make you feel more confident and you'll be less likely to fumble around for words.
- Be specific about the compliment. “That necklace looks really good on you” makes a bigger impact compared to “you look really good today”. The more specific the better, it makes the person feel like you have really noticed them.
- Mean what you say. People can tell the difference between sincerity and phoniness.

- Don't overdo it. A couple of sentences will do. ("You did a good job at ..." or "You really did well in")
- Smile and be enthusiastic when you give compliments. It makes the other person feel that you really mean it.
- Be appropriate: Consider the setting and your relationship with the person. Commenting on a colleague's new hair colour is fine, but mentioning it to your boss could be stepping out of bounds.
- Ask a question with your compliment. If you want to use the compliment as a conversational starter, ask a question about the subject of your compliment; "that necklace looks really good on you. Where did you find it?"

Think about a recent example when you admired something about someone (e.g., their clothing, the work they handed in, a generous act they did) and when you did NOT compliment them. What could you have said to this person? Why didn't you give them a compliment? Spend a moment and write down some thoughts. And then think about what you could have said to them.

Module summary

- It is an important assertiveness and social skill to be able to receive and give criticism.
- As with the other assertiveness skills there can be some unhelpful thinking stopping us from being able to accept criticism graciously. This thinking can be challenged and changed.
- It is also useful and friendly to be able to give compliments
- We need to practice receiving and giving compliments regularly. This can impact positively on our self esteem and the self esteem of those around us.

Coming up:

The next module pulls all the assertiveness skills together and shows you how to start practising to become more assertive

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BACKGROUND

The concepts and strategies in the modules have been developed from evidence based psychological practice, primarily Cognitive-Behaviour Therapy (CBT). CBT is a type of psychotherapy that is based on the theory that unhelpful negative emotions and behaviours are strongly influenced by problematic cognitions (thoughts). This can be found in the following:

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