

Using DESC to Make Your Difficult Conversations More Effective

During difficult conversations, when the stakes and emotions are high, defensiveness in others, when responding, may derail all of your best intentions. The DESC response is a tool used to decrease defensiveness in an assertive manner.

Assertiveness means standing up for your personal rights - expressing thoughts, feelings and beliefs in direct, honest and appropriate ways. It is also respecting the thoughts, feelings and beliefs of others.

The DESC script was developed by Sharon and Gordon Bower and is discussed more fully in their book, *Asserting Yourself*. **DESC** stands for **Describe, Express, Specify** and **Consequences**.

To develop more assertiveness, practice using the DESC script. Try writing down what you will say and practice it before you talk to the person.

DESCRIBE - Describe the behavior/situation as completely and objectively as possible. Just the facts!

“Jerry, the last project we worked on, I did all of the setup for the presentation by myself and it took me almost an hour.”

EXPRESS - Express your feelings or thoughts about the behavior/situation. Try phrasing your statements using “I” and not “You”. Beginning sentences with You often puts people on the defensive, which means they won’t listen to you.

“I felt overwhelmed, exhausted and frustrated.”

SPECIFY - Specify what behavior/outcome you would prefer to happen.

“I would like us to work together on the setup for the next presentation.”

CONSEQUENCES - Specify the consequences if this happens. (Both positive and negative)

“This way we can complete the setup in less time, giving us both a chance to gather our thoughts before we present.”

Adapted: Sharon and Gordon Bowers book, *Asserting Yourself*.

When you are assertive you are able to:

- Decrease defensiveness.
- Express and communicate your feeling accurately.
- Ask for things you want and say no to things you do not want.
- Have the opportunity to have your interests (needs, wants, concerns, fears) met.
- Attain the respect of others.