



# healthfocus clinical psychology

**NEWSLETTER  
WINTER 2018**

Hello everyone,

Winter is here! We're not talking about a popular TV series, but rather the early start to Perth's rainy season and the wettest June in 6 years. Recently, temperatures dropped and the school holidays have been chilly, so there has been plenty of rugging up to keep warm.

It's been an exciting time at Healthfocus since the Autumn newsletter. Yaw Yung has completed his internship and is enjoying a well-deserved holiday overseas before he decides where to take his career.

A new intern Miss Winne Lai, is starting with Healthfocus, and you may talk to or see her at both Riverton and Armadale clinics.

Our Riverton office is preparing for NBN, so please bear with us if there are hiccups with communications! Please contact Armadale if you can't get through...

We would like to remind our clients and referrers that we offer reduced gap fees for clients who hold any health concession card, and will bulk bill for any client whose GP deems is under hardship. Simply note such on the referral and we will process accordingly.

We have a shorter waiting list for appointments at Riverton, so we are offering new and current clients referred to Armadale the option to attend sessions at Riverton with a reduced gap fee to offset additional travel costs. Yong, Zdenka, Monique and Yeow all have sessions at Riverton.

Many clients have asked about relationship counselling because it is sometimes helpful before or after individual therapy for psychological conditions.

Healthfocus provides relationship counselling, including for couples and families, although Medicare rebates are not available for relationship services.

Included in this newsletter is an information piece that Dr Zdenka Bartova has prepared about *Assertiveness*, and how being assertive is a useful skill that can help with reducing stress, anxiety and depression.

We look forward to hearing from you soon...

-- Yong and the Healthfocus team

*We have a shorter waiting list at Riverton so clients attending Armadale have the option to attend sessions at Riverton with a reduced gap fee to offset additional time and travel costs*

## Reflections from Yaw Yung

Working at Healthfocus has been an interesting and exciting experience. I am grateful to Dr Yong Lee for giving me this opportunity. Before I started the internship at Healthfocus, I had just finished University and had ZERO work experience. I didn't have much hope that I would be offered this internship and I was surprised and beyond happy to have this chance.

I got to learn all sorts of things including conducting intake interviews, administration work such as calling clients, GPs, insurance companies and other stakeholders. I also had the opportunity to build rapport with clients and observe psychological treatment sessions.

During the internship I had a one on one session with Dr Yong to learn about clinical skills such as interviewing. I learned about about grief, depression, anxiety and other psychological challenges that our clients face.

Importantly, I had the pleasure of work with great people: Jane, Rachel and Ushta. Even though I knew nothing when I first started, they were great teachers and showed me what I needed to know, guiding me when I needed support. Whenever I had any questions, they would answer them. I remember that Jane said to me "There are no stupid questions", which really helped my confidence.

I also want to thank Dr Debbie and the rest of the psychologists because they shared with me their experiences and how they got to where they are today.

The most interesting part of the internship was when Dr Yong gave me an opportunity to sit in on a number of psychological counselling sessions for which we must also thank the clients who consented to me observing. I learned so much about what happens during psychological treatment.

This internship has been a truly amazing experience.

Thank you to everyone at Healthfocus!

-- Yaw Yung



## Welcome to Miss Winne Lai

Winne is a 3rd year undergraduate student in psychology at the University of Western Australia who is undertaking an internship with Healthfocus to get to know what psychology practice is like in a private clinic setting.

She has a friendly disposition and will fit in well with our clinical and administration team and will be "learning the ropes" at Riverton and Armadale.

Be sure to say hello to Winne if you see her.

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# Assertiveness

## ***“You have to be more assertive”***

How many times have we been told by someone that “you need to learn to stand up for yourself”? Some of us may agree that we lack assertiveness, while others may worry that by being assertive we may come across as being aggressive.

Assertiveness refers to interpersonal behaviours through which we inform others of our own needs, opinions and feelings without belittling or blaming the other persons (McCabe & Timmins, 2003). It reflects how much we are seen as speaking up for our own interests, and expressing our own rights, thoughts and feelings in a situationally appropriate way without denying the rights of others (Ames, 2008; McCabe & Timmins, 2003).

There are barriers that can prevent individuals from being assertive, including a lack of knowledge about our own rights, concerns about other people’s perceptions of our behaviours, and a lack of self-confidence (McCabe & Timmins, 2003).

Lack of assertiveness has been associated with low self-esteem, and may result in increased stress, anxiety or unhealthy relationships (Michel, 2008). Being assertive is a learned behaviour that involves a number of verbal and nonverbal communication skills (e.g., expressing one’s opinion, starting “difficult conversations” rather than avoiding, saying ‘no’, and maintaining eye contact).

Applying assertiveness may have consequences. For example, someone who lacks assertiveness may reflect that there are people who benefit from it and therefore may not welcome increased assertiveness. If an individual is a “people-pleaser” who always helps others, even when it is not in his or her own best interests, then others who have overly relied on “generosity” in the past may struggle to adjust when the individual starts saying ‘no’ to requests for help.

Underpinning assertive skills are the rights of every individual. And just as assertive communication skills may come with some costs, so do these rights come with responsibilities. Below are some examples of rights supporting assertiveness:

### **You have the right to:**

- Express your own feelings, opinions and needs
- Disagree with someone’s opinions
- Be treated with respect
- Say ‘no’ or ‘yes’ for yourself
- Make mistakes and be responsible for them
- Change your mind and be illogical in making decisions
- Ask for more information
- Assess your own responsibility for finding solutions to other people's problems or decline responsibility for other people’s problems
- Deal with other people without being dependent on them for approval
- Say “I don’t know” or “I don’t understand”
- Offer no reasons or excuses for justifying your behaviour

One of the most common misconceptions is that assertive communication is aggressive, whereas in reality there are clear differences between these two communication styles. In addition, some people might be so concerned about being seen as aggressive, that they end up communicating in a passive manner.

Let's look at some of the differences between passive, assertive and aggressive communication:

	<b>Passive</b> "You're okay, I'm not"	<b>Assertive</b> "You're okay, I'm okay"	<b>Aggressive</b> "I'm okay, you're not"
<b>Verbal characteristics:</b>  <b>Voice</b>  <b>Tone</b>  <b>Words</b>  <b>Opinions</b>	Is afraid to speak up  Soft unsteady voice  Long rambling sentences with hesitations  Uses fill-in words (e.g., "maybe" or "um")  Uses self put-downs, apologies or justifications (e.g., "I might be wrong")	Speaks openly  Firm, relaxed voice  Uses conversational tone and fluent, steady pace  Uses co-operative phrases and emphatic statements  Uses constructive criticism without blame and seeks others' opinions	Interrupts and talks over others  Strident, sarcastic or condescending voice  Often fast and abrupt, may be shouting  Uses threats, put downs and threatening questions  Expresses opinions as facts and is often boastful
<b>Non-verbal characteristics:</b>	Averted gaze  Slouched posture and hunched shoulders to make body smaller  Wringing hands that may be fidgety or clammy  Covers mouth with hand  Crosses arms for protection  Lip biting	Direct eye contact without staring  Open, balanced body posture  Open hand movements with appropriate gestures  Steady features  Receptive listening	Stares the other person down  Body posture may include head high, hands on hips and feet apart to make body bigger  Gestures such as pointing, fist clenching or hands on hips  Crosses arms (unapproachable)  May stride around impatiently
<b>Goal setting</b>	Does not reach goals and may not have own goals  May be motivated by conflict avoidance	Usually reaches goals without hurting others  Self-motivated	Reaches goals but hurts others in the process  May be motivated by instant gratification
<b>Social behaviour</b>	Isolates self from groups  Values self less than others  Agrees with others regardless of personal feelings	Participates in groups  Values self and others equally  Keeps to the point	Controls groups  Values self more than others  Considers only his/her own feelings, or makes demands of others

Remember that assertiveness is not something that one must practice all the time. For example, one may be assertive in the workplace but prefer to “go with the flow” when with friends, unless their behaviours violate one’s rights. Knowing how to be assertive therefore gives us a choice in how to respond in different situations.

There are a number of techniques that can be applied. Basic assertion refers to clear expression of needs, wants, thoughts or feelings, and may be used to provide information or give compliments (e.g., “I really appreciate your help”). Other types of assertion techniques may be used to express needs while recognising other people’s feelings (i.e. empathic assertion), or to influence others to change their behaviour by explaining to the person the consequences of not changing their behaviour (i.e. consequence assertion). Other techniques allow us to highlight a discrepancy between prior agreement and actual action (discrepancy assertion), or point out the effect of another person’s behaviour on you (negative feelings assertion).

Another technique is the “broken record” method that refers to repeating a prepared statement in a calm and relaxed manner. For instance, if a person asks you for a favour you do not want to provide (e.g., picking a friend up from a late party), you may wish to prepare and repeat a statement, such as “I can’t pick you up because the party finishes too late and I need to wake up early”, even when someone keeps trying to persuade you. It is useful for individuals who find it difficult to say ‘no’.

There are **four steps** that are effective when communicating assertively, as demonstrated in the following sentence template:

**When you** \_\_\_\_\_ (Describe the behaviour that prompted your response. Remember to keep to facts, without over-generalisations. Be specific and non-judgmental)

**I feel** \_\_\_\_\_ (Describe your emotional response)

**Because** \_\_\_\_\_ (Describe the impact the other person’s behaviour had on you)

**I would like/ What I want (need) from you is** \_\_\_\_\_ (Ask for what you need or what you would like to happen instead).

To illustrate how the four steps can be put into practice, please read the following example:

Let’s say that a friend arrived late to social appointments on several occasions. A passive communicator would not raise the issue, even if he or she felt hurt or angry. If the friend apologised, the communicator might say something along the lines of “I don’t mind, it doesn’t matter”, even when this is not true. The situation may lead to resentment, refusal to arrange future appointments with this friend (giving other excuses), and a distance in the friendship.

An aggressive communicator may on the other hand start hurling accusations, yelling, belittling or threatening the friend. For example: “You’re always late, I’ve had enough, you are the worst friend ever, so don’t ever ask me to catch up again”. The situation may result in a rift in the friendship that may not be repaired.

A person who practices assertiveness could instead say something like this:

**“When you** run late for our appointments, **I feel** hurt **because** to me it seems as if you do not care about me. I understand that sometimes you may be held up at work but in the future **I would like** it if you could text me letting me know beforehand how late you will be so that I can adjust accordingly.”

In conclusion, being assertive does not mean that we will always get what we want. However, assertiveness can help us increase our awareness of our own needs and set boundaries, and may help us be aware of and clarify our goals. Assertiveness can also lead to a greater sense of control of our lives, and bring us closer to others, improving self-esteem.

### References

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