

Lesson #10: It's Your Right to be Thin Contents:

Stop Being Manipulated and Become More Assertive

As human beings the goal of self-esteem is basic and vital to our sense of wellbeing and must become a part of every human relationship. The potential of human nature is endless if it is properly nurtured and developed. Loving, caring, honesty and responsibility in our current dealings with each other remain basic traditional values that must be preserved if we are to maintain the freedom that we value so highly in our society. We must learn to express ourselves freely and honestly if we are going to feel good about ourselves, and must deter attempts to make us feel bad about ourselves if we are to achieve the happiness in life that we all rightfully seek.

As part of an overall program of self-improvement, an individual needs to learn to act in his own best interests, to exercise his own rights while not denying the rights of others, to express his honest feelings without undue anxiety and to develop a repertoire of appropriate and self-fulfilling responses with which he feels comfortable in a variety of encounters with other human beings.

Handling the saboteur of weight control

The loss of excessive body fat and maintenance of a trim figure is also only part of a total program of self-improvement. Just as there are many "cues" which affect our eating behavior, there are many factors which tend to undermine our attempts at weight reduction and maintenance. Our purpose is to identify these environmental and social influences and present you with an organized method of dealing with them. Our many years of experience in helping overweight patients solve their problems has convinced us of the pressing need to teach techniques of coping with the many anxiety provoking situations which inhibit performance of the multiple tasks required in a weight control effort.

Once you have made the commitment to treat your weight problem, you may encounter many stumbling blocks and obstacles placed before you by your closest friends and family members. Even though you may have had the best of intentions, they may attempt to manipulate your behavior to conform to their interests and desires. Their main technique may be to make you feel guilty (either directly or indirectly) if you do not give in to their urgings. Guilt is a potent force which will cause you to deviate from your best of intentions most of the time, causing you additional guilt about your inappropriate eating behavior. This creates tension and anxiety, reinforcing your beliefs: "I knew I was no darn good" and "I'll always be a failure." This only

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confirms your feelings of low self-esteem. A demoralizing evaluation of yourself only leads to more inadequate behavior, negative feedback and an attitude of self-depreciation. This depressive state in itself may often be the cause of more impulse eating (e.g., binge-eating) and more guilt. The vicious cycle has been established and reinforced. It must be broken at all

Clinical Nutrition Center

7555 E. Hampden Ave., Suite 301, Denver, CO 80231
303-750-9454

Ethan Lazarus, MD • www.ClinicalNutritionCenter.com

costs, or, indeed, you'll always be a failure. The only effective means of breaking this repetitive cycle is for you to learn to become more assertive.

The main purpose of this manual is to help you become more assertive in situations which involve even the remotest chance of your eating inappropriately. We will limit ourselves to that area and touch upon the general area of assertive behavior only as it applies to the weight control field. Our reason for doing so is to keep things simple and to avoid lengthy discussions which might cause a deviation from our primary intent: to help you to gain control over your own eating behavior.

Feeling good about yourself is important

There is no question that learning to become more assertive in food-associated situations will tend to rub off in other areas of your life (and vice-versa). That's all the better. It will contribute to your feeling good about yourself not only in controlling your weight but also in many other important spheres in your life. Since this improvement in self-esteem will reinforce your confidence in your ability to control your eating, new behavior patterns in unrelated areas of your life will have value for solving your weight problem.

Assertiveness is not aggressiveness

Lest we be misunderstood in what we are proposing, we wish to differentiate two commonly confused terms.

An *assertive* person is one who acts in his own best interest and who is able to express his honest feelings without undue anxiety. It is a self-fulfilling behavior which does not deny the rights of others. The assertive person is completely in charge of himself and his affairs. He feels capable, confident, and has no hostility or cockiness towards others. He tends to express his feelings spontaneously, is generally admired and looked up to by his peers and does not trample upon his fellow human beings. He is open, flexible and genuinely concerned not only with his own rights, but also the rights of those he deals with. While he does not attempt to manipulate others, he values the right to his own opinion and expresses it freely without fear of consequences. He takes full responsibility for his behavior and acknowledges that he has the right to be himself without guilt, as long as he does not hurt another person in the process.

An *aggressive* person, on the other hand, is completely different. He tends to overreact by responding too vigorously. Nevertheless, he ordinarily leaves a negative impression and generates friction, frustration and hatred in those with whom he has contact. He is basically insecure and filled with

much anxiety, is extremely sensitive to criticism and feels rejected most of the time. He attempts to cover up his insecurity by being offensive and "putting down" the recipients of his volatile aggressive outbursts, but only ends up being rejected by his acquaintances who have little affection and esteem for him. He has few true friends and attempts to reach out for affection by his abusive behavior. He may occasionally achieve his goal, but since he is unable to respond honestly to emotional stimuli, he leaves a wake of frustration, vengeance and unhappiness. The slightest threat to his security will trigger a typically belligerent eruption which continues to alienate the majority of those around him. He is generally considered offensive, has a very difficult time in establishing close interpersonal relationships, and thus feels rejected, lonely and unhappy.

The main difference, then, between assertive and aggressive behavior is that in the former there is an honest confrontation whereas in the latter there is a bitter and angry adverse reaction.

Inhibitions are shed by action

To varying degrees, the overweight person often feels inadequate, has a very low degree of self-esteem and responds to many food-related social situations with a high degree of uncomfortable anxiety. The physical discomfort generated by this anxiety coupled with a lack of acknowledgement of self-worth, often causes her to seek escape by overindulging in the temporary comfort yielded by certain foods. You might ask, how can an insecure individual learn to shed her feelings of inadequacy and

generate an attitude of self-worth? “How can I learn to act more assertively unless I change my attitude about my shortcomings first?” Well, the answer is almost too simple. By changing the way you behave FIRST, you will rid yourself of your poor image! Experience has shown that if you start to practice new assertive behavior patterns, albeit in small, progressive steps, the self-enhancing nature of this behavior will generate positive feedback from others. People will begin to respect your rights and treat you like the worthwhile person you really are. This will help instill a sensation of feeling good about yourself and counteract the anxiety usually provoked by various situations. Anxiety and a feeling of well-being about your accomplishments are mutually exclusive. The most effective way to change your inhibited, negative attitude about yourself is to begin to act in a more assertive manner. Strange as this may sound to you, rest assured it will happen. It has happened in many before you who took the advice to change behavior first – the right attitude will follow.

For that reason, it is extremely important that you begin your assertive behavior in small steps, in areas where you are more certain to be successful. The positive reinforcement of a favorable outcome to your new assertive behavior will supply the self-confidence you need to tackle more difficult situations. Success builds success!

First eliminate some mental myths

Before describing some actual assertive coping techniques, we need to counter some popular misconceptions which are often used as rationalizations for inhibitory, non-assertive, anxiety-producing behavior. We will first list the mental myth, then the true facts (based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights), followed by some examples to illustrate each point.

MENTAL MYTH ONE: Some human beings are of lesser value than others.

TRUE FACT: All human beings are born free and entitled to equal rights and dignity.

As a human being, a professor is no better than a student, an executive no better than an employee, a general no better than a private, a financially successful person no better than one not financially successful, a bishop no better than a priest.

In interpersonal relations there is no hierarchy of roles. If you are trying to stick to a prescribed food program to control your weight, there is no human being that is better than you on this artificial scale, and it is your perfect right to refuse to deviate from it, regardless of another’s fervent urgings for you to digress.

MENTAL MYTH TWO: You can’t teach an old dog new tricks. I can’t change the way I am.

TRUE FACT: It’s a learning process. It may take longer for an

old dog, but it’s well worth the effort.

Perhaps you are not really convinced of the need for a change. You’re comfortable in your old inhibitory habits and it’s too much effort to change. Well, consider this: Have people taken advantage of you and manipulated you to eat foods you really did not want to eat? Have they made you feel guilty if you resisted their persistent demands? Did your spouse or a friend ever criticize you for eating improperly, when you knew very well what you did wrong? – and you did not need their remarks regarding your gluttony? – they only made you feel worse? You could not bring yourself to talk back to them without starting an argument? Did it produce more personal anguish, self-recrimination and disappointment in your ability to cope with food? Wouldn’t you like to be able to free yourself from this burden and feel good about the way you responded? So, think again, isn’t it worth the effort? If you’re truthful the answer will be affirmative.

MENTAL MYTH THREE: Your behavior must be judged by an authority greater and wiser than yourself. Only external rules and regulations should determine the appropriateness of your actions, because you are not qualified to have independent opinions about yourself.

TRUE FACT: You have the right to be the final judge of yourself, and no one has the right to manipulate you. You have the full right to initiate what you feel is correct behavior for you and you take full responsibility for

the consequences it will have on you.

It's your life and how you live it is up to you. What happens in it is your responsibility and no one else's. The denial of this responsibility for your actions is an inhibitory response often couched in an excuse such as: I was merely following orders. The correct response is that you choose to behave in a certain manner. Your independent judgment in making a choice is better examined by asking the following question: I like – I don't like... or I should – I shouldn't... In the first instance your choice is made on your past experience and what works best for you. In the second instance you are being manipulated. You have chosen to do something based on an external rule or an arbitrary judgment made not by you, but by someone else. The second behavior may often be inhibitory.

Consider the following example: You're on a strict food program and getting along beautifully. Your 70-year-old father goes Christmas shopping with you on his visit to your home during the holidays. You decide to stop in a coffee shop to relax before driving home. You would like just a cup of tea (you'll be eating dinner shortly after you arrive home). Although you make a feeble attempt to convince father that you really don't want anything to eat, father insists. After all, father knows best, "besides, I only see you once a year and you wouldn't want your father to have to eat all by himself would you?" So you eat a hamburger with French fries – and help father finish his pie, because "it's not right to waste food."

Apply the rule of "I like" (I am the final judge of my behavior, no one has the right to manipulate me) versus "I should" (external rules are wiser than mine, I am not qualified to have independent opinions – daddy, the authority, is wiser – he knows "what's best for me"). Can you see the error in this mental myth? By being assertive you stick to the true fact.

MENTAL MYTH FOUR: You must justify your behavior to others and explain your reasons for your actions, because they have a right to know your motives.

TRUE FACT: You have the right to offer no explanations for your behavior and need not make excuses to justify your actions.

This is the most common method by which others will attempt to manipulate you to deviate from your food program. You do not need someone else to decide if what you are doing is right or wrong. Remember, you are the final judge (myth three), and you take full responsibility for what you do. The ploy is to get you to give reasons for your actions so that they may then be used to convince you that you are wrong. Don't fall for this manipulative trap as illustrated in the following common episode:

Hostess: Why don't you want any, I made it JUST FOR YOU? (she is beginning to generate a guilt-feeling in you – after all, you don't want to hurt HER feelings. Her voice intonation to you indicates that HER feelings are more important than YOUR feelings.

You: It has too many calories, and I can't afford to eat any more. (You've fallen into the trap. You gave her a reason. Now she'll use that to manipulate your behavior).

Hostess: Oh, just ONE bite won't hurt you. There are just a few calories in one bite – and remember I worked all day making it just for YOU! (generating more guilt-feeling in you). Won't you just TASTE a little bit? Here, I'll cut you off just a tiny piece (as she puts a regular-sized slice on your plate).

You: Oh, I guess, just a little bit won't hurt – but I'll just taste a small portion. (you have accepted her "brainwashing" technique).

To make a long story short, the dessert was good. In fact, you liked it so much that you ate the whole piece served for sampling purposes only, but also let the hostess convince you to take the rest of it home with you (I made it JUST FOR YOU) using your own explanations for refusal to convince you that you are wrong.

That could all have been avoided had you stopped after your initial statement of your honest feeling at the time. If you are wondering "How can I refuse to give a reason to my friends?" The answer is simple. Your friend has no right to require you to give a reason for any or all of your actions. He is not the judge of the appropriateness of your behavior – you are the judge. Your friend may tell you he does not like your behavior (that's his assertive right). You can then choose to compromise or change your behavior based on both your likes. On the other hand, for him to manipulate you to feel guilty and change your behavior because he thinks it is wrong, does not really

indicate a true friendship, but a fragile manipulative one. Which kind do you prefer? It's your choice.

MENTAL MYTH FIVE: You must be able to answer all questions in regards to consequences of your actions. Lacking such knowledge, you must be controlled because your actions are irresponsible.

TRUE FACT: You have the right to make a choice about how you wish to act without knowing all the consequences for such behavior. When questioned about what your behavior might cause, you have the right to say: "I don't know."

Just as you have the right not to explain why you do something, you also have the right to say "I don't know." Other people will attempt to manipulate your behavior by having you feel guilty for doing something if you cannot predict what the outcome of an action would be. They then try to convince you that doing what you want is wrong because it is irresponsible and you should do what they want. (Notice the application of the "I want" vs. "I should" conflict).

This erroneous concept of expecting an individual to know all answers to all questions was used by friends and relatives of patients who made the decision to participate in the protein sparing modified fast (PSMF) – especially in the initial phases of the development of this program, before it became more universally known. Questions such as: "What would happen if Aunt Minnie came for a visit and saw you were not eating anything?" "What will they think of you when you are guest of honor at the X-club dinner, and all

you do is drink coffee?" "What will happen to the wrinkles on your face when you lose weight so rapidly?" "What will it do to your disposition?" "What kind of doctor would put a patient on a program where he takes no food for months on end?" "What if everybody who is overweight decided to go on the PSMF?" "How many would die of starvation without food?" "What will this do to your heart?"

If you bite the hook on this manipulation and try to delineate possible outcomes without specific knowledge, you've been baited. The manipulator will present all sorts of arguments about why you should not do what you really want, but what he thinks is the proper diet for you to go on, etc.

The correct response to all these questions is: "I don't know, but I want to do it!" No further explanation is needed. If the manipulator wants to speculate on the consequences, let him – that's his right. Your right is to say: "I don't know!"

MENTAL MYTH SIX: If you have made a mistake you should feel guilty and make amends. It proves you cannot cope and make your own decisions and others will have to make them for you.

TRUE FACT: To err is human. You have the right to make mistakes and also be responsible for them.

This is one of the most difficult myths for a person with a weight

problem to cope with. Just because one has made a mistake, does not mean the end of the world has come. We all learn from our mistakes. Life is a continuum of trial and errors. Anyone who is brave enough to make decisions will make mistakes. To allow others to manipulate our behavior because we are not perfect is to take on the

passive inhibitory role which causes a large share of anxiety – and often leads to binge-eating. We will illustrate.

You have the right to be the final judge of yourself, and no one has the right to manipulate you.

You decide to go on the comprehensive weight control protocol which includes the PSMF for the weight-loss portion. You have

made the decision that you want to do it. During the fasting portion you will not be able to cook for your family. You have two daughters who can take over this job, but they don't like to cook, and the family enjoys your cooking better. Your family does not wish to give up their enjoyment of having you prepare their meals. Rather than being assertive and telling you they don't like to be without your cooking because they have to sacrifice their pleasures for a limited period of time to help you achieve what you want, they will manipulate you into getting their way. Watch the subterfuge in the following dialogue.

Family: Are you going on another diet, again?

You: Yes, this time I really want to do this; the approach is different from what I attempted before, it's very comprehensive, and I will have a lot of professional help.

Family: But every time you have dieted before... you have been a failure. You just can't stay away from food. Besides, there is no point in your spending any more of the family money on your dieting attempts. We need a new car and some new clothes for the kids, and it's selfish for you to spend money on yourself, especially for something you always fail with. (Notice you are really being "snowed" with guilt feelings about something you want to do.)

At this point you could go into an aggressive rage about how selfish they really are. You've cooked for them all these years and rarely have they ever so much as said "thank you." Aggressiveness is not the answer to your problem though. You've tried that before, and it didn't work. They beat you down every time by telling you what a fat slob you are, and if you wouldn't make such a glutton of yourself you wouldn't cause all this embarrassment to the rest of the family. Since you don't like shouting arguments you try once more, but in the following feeble manner:

You: Yes, I realize what you say, but I really feel bad about my obesity problem and I should try just once more. (Forget about should, don't be so inhibited. Why not admit you want to do it? It's your right to have "wants" too.) Your meek approach leads to this response:

Family: Last time you dieted, we really had to suffer. We had all this horrible diet food in the house, and nothing decent to eat. And then you went and gained all your weight back. So, what's the point? (They are really piling the guilt on you now, implying that since you erred

in the past, you'll err again, and are incapable of making your own decisions about dieting. Besides, you need to atone for your past sins and not put them through this discomfort again. You can make up the wrong you have done them by being a good cook and continuing to prepare their meals and let them spend the "diet money" for the things that they want).

You: (Feeling pretty guilty now about your past dieting errors; they have rubbed them in pretty hard.) Well, maybe you are right. It is sort of selfish of me. Maybe I should just try to watch what I eat for a while (here is that word "should" again). I apologize for having brought up the subject. (I feel so guilty now for having offended you in the past with my mistakes, I really "shouldn't" be so selfish – I'll make it up to you by cooking you an especially good dinner tonight.) Deep down inside, you are probably resentful, maybe even angry (lots of anxiety producing emotions, all cooped in). You have been manipulated to the point of making an apology. That night after dinner, when everyone else is asleep, you feel so frustrated that you go on a binge-eating spree. Remember your right to make mistakes. No apologies are necessary or required unless you choose to make them.

MENTAL MYTH SEVEN: Once you have committed yourself to a course of action, you can't change your mind without admitting guilt for having made an error.

TRUE FACT: You have the right to change your mind based on your feelings without the need to justify your new choice.

In the previous myth we indicated that you need not be apologetic for mistakes you have made. The seventh right takes us one step further. You can change course simply because your interests change, conditions change or your desires change from what they were in the past. The manipulators will attempt to make you feel "flighty" and unable to make decisions. They will argue that since you cannot "make up your mind" they have to make decisions for you. Don't be tricked by that subterfuge. To change your mind is healthy and normal. We all do it at times.

Suppose you have decided to attend a certain party a month in advance. You have pre-planned your eating behavior – know just how and what you are going to eat. You have informed your spouse about your decision to attend. When the day arrives you don't feel up to it. You don't feel that under the present circumstances you could cope with the food cues there. So you change your mind. You inform your spouse you don't want to go. When he asks why, you state your reason. He does not think how you feel is a legitimate reason, and proceeds to tell you how undependable you are and how unfair it is to him to change his schedule just because "you've changed your mind" about going. He makes you feel guilty enough to give in to his insistence on going anyway. After all, you are incapable of making decisions for yourself, so he has to make them for you. He wants to go, so he has manipulated you into feeling so guilty about your indecision that he has caused you to behave the way you think you should rather than the way you want to act.

You have neglected your basic right to change your mind based on nothing more than your wanting to change it.

MENTAL MYTH EIGHT: In judging your eating behavior you must use the logic or all or none, yes or no, black or white.

TRUE FACT: Everything in life is not all black or white. There are shades of gray. Thus, decisions we make can be based on how we feel at the moment rather than on what's right or wrong.

This concept is most troublesome for the obese individual due to a phenomenon we have termed “self-manipulation.” The remarks and actions of others will often cause you to manipulate yourself. The erroneous premise is that all things have to fit into either a positive or negative slot and there is no room for in-betweens. This is particularly dangerous when you review how successful you have been in making some of the decisions that you had a perfect right to make.

Put yourself in the place of a school teacher who makes the commitment to avoid all “sweets” for the next month. Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of the first week went just perfectly. Not a bite of sweets. You're quite proud of yourself. Thursday was a rough day because you observed all the skinny students munch on candy bars during the local football game. (How unfair it is, I feel like a martyr; why can't I be like other people? I have deprived myself for four days and so far the scale hasn't shown any loss.) Friday was bad, too. My thin sister ate a whole bag of cookies during her visit in our

home. (Why can't I be like my sister? She doesn't understand how I suffer when I watch her eat.)

Saturday night you have a party for some friends. You bake their favorite cake. You stubbornly refuse to eat any of it, even though you were prompted by your friends to have “just one little piece.” You stick it out even though you had a rough time of it. The party is over. Your friends leave – but, there is some cake left over. You put it away without even so much as a taste. Sunday morning you get on the scale. You're up a pound! (You forgot your period is due next Tuesday and you always retain some water at this time of the month.) You are very discouraged. On your next trip to the kitchen you notice the leftover cake. You feel very depressed (usually at that time of the month you feel that way anyway). So you have a piece of the cake (Gosh, that tasted good – I blew it! So I may as well have another). You eat two more pieces. Now you really feel depressed and blue. (I always blow it on the weekends. That cake will probably cost me a 3 lb. weight gain. Well, I might as well enjoy myself; I couldn't keep my promise of avoiding sweets for even a week. I'll always be a failure!) The rest of Sunday is just one big binge of eating anything and everything in sight.

Can you see the erroneous thinking? Just two choices: You ate no sweets at all or ate sweets. Everything is either black or white. There are no grays. Life just isn't that simple or logical. If you had analyzed the situation properly, you would have realized that you had gone six whole days without one bite of sweets – something you had never accomplished before. Just

because you had the first bite of cake didn't mean that all was lost! You did achieve at least some degree of success. So your manipulated thinking – I blew it and may as well have another – caused you to fall into the either ALL or NONE trap. Your decision to eat the cake on Sunday was based on how you felt at the time and you acted accordingly (one of your rights). It did not mean that everything you did before was also wrong.

Watch out for others manipulating you in the same way. “Honey, you ate all this bread during dinner, so you might as well have the French pastry, too.” Not true. You still reserve your right not to eat the pastry if you feel you don't want to add insult to injury. The manipulator's argument that all your actions must be logical doesn't hold water. Remember that.

MENTAL MYTH NINE: You must be sensitive to the needs of other people, never questioning their motives.

TRUE FACT: You have the right to question what another person means by a remark he makes and to have him spell out his needs to you.

Under this category belong many non-verbal cues used by those who wish to manipulate your behavior to satisfy their (not your) needs. Included are an angry or hurt look. Sometimes, a well placed silence will accomplish the same manipulation. This ploy is used by the manipulator instead of verbally telling you why he wants you to do a certain thing.

You have made a reservation for 8 p.m. in an exclusive restaurant.

You arrive promptly at 8 p.m. and the maitre d' informs you that there will be a 15-minute wait before your reserved table is ready. He shows you to an ante-room which has a bar and several small tables surrounded by chairs. Your party is seated at one of these tables for your 15-minute wait. Soon the cocktail waitress appears with pad and pencil with a facial expression telling you: You are expected to order some drinks while you are waiting here. (You have no intention of having any alcohol before dinner – it was not included in your food plans for that evening – you cannot afford to spend the extra calories). You tell her you don't think you wish to order any drinks. Her facial expression and mannerism now changes to one of anger telling you in a non-verbal way: While you are sitting at this table it is proper for you to order drinks. You are expected to understand that you should (that word again) order drinks while waiting to be seated for dinner. That makes you feel so uncomfortable that you change your decision from what you want to do to what you should be doing. After all, you are expected to understand that one does not wait in a restaurant of this kind without ordering drinks. (I don't want them to think I am an odd ball in this prestigious establishment. I must make a good impression.) So, you order a round of drinks and leave her a larger than normal tip (you want that facial expression to change to one of approval). On the way out you think to yourself: What a rip-off. Not only was this a very expensive dinner, for which I paid in full, but it's not my fault my table wasn't ready at 8 p.m. – that's just a way to sell some drinks. You may even be so upset when you get

home that you'll raid the refrigerator and seek comfort in food. You've been manipulated – without a word being spoken. You had a perfect right to ask why you should order a drink and expect a verbal response spelled out to you – and then make your decision, whether you wanted to order a drink or not.

MENTAL MYTH TEN: You have an obligation to find solutions to the problems of other people, even if it means sacrificing your own values. It's your responsibility to worry about their problems and consider them your problems.

TRUE FACT: You have the right to decide whether it is your responsibility to find solutions to other people's problems.

Just as you are responsible for your own happiness and well-being, so do other people have the ultimate responsibility to find solutions to their problems. Nevertheless, they will often attempt to manipulate you into feeling that their problems are your problems, and you therefore have to do what they want (rather than what you want). When you really think about it, you can only please another person by doing what they want you to do on a temporary basis. You cannot create happiness for someone else over the long haul. There is nothing wrong with being compassionate and having love for your fellow person. Yet, in the final analysis, each one of us must learn to cope with the problems of living by assuming the responsibility for solving our own problems.

Suppose you have a mother-in-law of Italian ancestry who decides

to visit you for the summer. Her primary pleasure in life is to cook the dishes she has learned to prepare from her ethnic background.

She may have been looking forward to preparing these dishes for you daily during her stay in your home. You feel that not allowing her to cook for you using her favorite ethnic recipes might hurt her feelings considerably. If this situation were handled in a normal assertive manner by both parties, you would express your appreciation for her visit. You should let her know that, while you very much enjoy her company, your weight control program is also very important to you, and it presently doesn't include pasta dishes. Your mother-in-law would verbalize both her desire to please you and her pride in her expertise in Italian cookery. The individual desires and happiness of both parties is freely communicated and a compromise is arrived at (e.g., next summer, after your weight has been stable, she will be able to demonstrate her culinary skills to you. By then you will have progressed and have learned techniques of coping with these foods – but this year you will enjoy each other's company without such tasty dishes).

On the other hand, if your in-law places her own wants and desires above yours (to cook like this is my only pleasure in life, and my happiness is more important than yours) she is very likely to manipulate you into feeling guilty about being so selfish. She will try to shift the responsibility of her problem (i.e., no other interests in life except cooking Italian food) onto your shoulders and make you feel that it is your responsibility to

find a solution to her problem. Notice how surreptitiously you are being manipulated into what she wants in the following dialogue:

Mother-in-law (M-I-L): How would you like me to prepare you my special lasagna followed by spumoni ice cream for dinner tonight?

You: No thanks, mother, I really shouldn't (here is that word again – why not say “I don't want any?”)

M-I-L: What's the matter, don't you like my cooking? Last summer you could not eat enough of it.

You: Yes, I know. That's the summer I gained 20 lbs. during your visit. I am trying to watch my weight, and I just don't think I *should* eat any.

M-I-L: You mean, I came all this way to visit you, and you aren't even going to let me show you how well I can prepare it? (This statement is accompanied by a very hurt facial expression – she is beginning to build a flurry of guilt in you.)

You: (Your emotions are stirred to feel sympathy and compassion for her problem). Well, I really *shouldn't* have any.

M-I-L: But how about your husband and children? Are you going to deprive them of the pleasure of my cooking all the time while I am here? (Piling on more guilt. It's your problem for being so selfish, and thinking only about your weight problem.)

Each one of us must learn to cope with the problems of living by assuming the responsibility for solving our own problems.

You: I *think* they'll understand that I have to be careful. (You are beginning to waver a bit, you only think so, you're not really sure.)

M-I-L: Don't you really care about the other people in this household? (It's your problem, now you better do something to solve it.)

You: Of course I care! What kind of a person do you take me for? I love my husband and children very much. (But maybe I am being a bit selfish about it.)

M-I-L: Why are you so stubborn? If you really cared about me, my son and my grandchildren, you would make things a bit easier for all of us by just forgetting about your dieting while I am visiting with you. (She has you cornered now. You better demonstrate that you mean what you say when you talk about how much you love your family.)

You: (Feeling very guilty and depressed now. You can't be like the typical stereotype of a nasty daughter-in-law. You will prove to them you're different. You will put their happiness before yours.) Okay, I guess I can get back on my diet *after* you leave. (I can't take away the only pleasure she has in life – and that's to cook – it's my responsibility to solve that problem for her.)

You have neglected your right to make your own decision on whether it's your responsibility to find solutions for another person's problem. You've been manipulated!

MENTAL MYTH ELEVEN: As a human being you have many flaws. You must strive to improve yourself until you are perfect.

TRUE FACT: You have the right to say that you don't have to be perfect according to someone else's definition of what is proper.

This is the ultimate trap. No one is perfect. If you set yourself up to be perfect according to someone else's arbitrary rules and regulations, you are forced to justify your behavior or make the recommended improvement. This is what we have termed the double-bind manipulation. It is used very often. For instance, a clever wine waiter in a restaurant does not ask you if you would like wine with your dinner. He does not want to give you the choice of saying yes or no. Instead, he will ask: “Would you like white wine or red wine with your dinner?” Can you see the double bind? He is giving you the choice of white or red. If you accept his statement and make a choice between the two types of wine, you have already accepted the notion that you are going to order wine with your dinner. In a similar vein, notice the much more subtle use of this technique in the following example.

Your spouse has been nagging you for the past 10 years about your obesity. He is constantly reminding you that you aren't the same girl he married when you were 40 lbs. lighter than you are now. Not only does he remind you that you are setting a bad example for the children, but he is always teasing you about your plump look in front of your friends. Even when you lost weight before, and thought you looked pretty good, he would

compare you to the overly thin models seen in magazines, in beauty contests and in some of the television commercials.

By accepting his arbitrary choice of what constitutes an improvement in your figure, you would always end up with feeble excuses for your failure to achieve the perfection that he has defined. This aroused more hostile feelings and anxiety within yourself, making your battle of the bulge even more difficult.

You let him manipulate you into thinking that you must be perfect according to his rules, rather than set your own criterion of when your efforts can be considered successful. By accepting his interpretation of what constitutes an improvement in your obesity problem, you have lost your self-respect. You have neglected your right to say: "I don't care what you think. I am doing the best I can. I am having a difficult time, but I am satisfied with my progress. I don't have to be perfect."

MENTAL MYTH TWELVE: I must never offend or hurt other people's feelings. I must be admired and liked by all those I deal with in order to deal with them effectively.

TRUE FACT: You have the right to be sensitive to the needs of only those to whom you feel close and even then you have the choice to decide if your needs are more important than their good will.

We have left this one for last, because this is the final sucker's catch. To paraphrase President Lincoln: You can please some of the people all of the time and all of

the people some of the time, but you can't please all of the people all of the time. This one really sums up all the other rights. To feel that all must love you is a gross distortion of common sense. Yet, there are numerous obese people who have never learned to say "no!" without extreme fear of losing someone's favor. This manipulation is the one to end all manipulations. Once more, we illustrate:

You: (speaking to the waiter in a restaurant) I would like sliced tomatoes instead of the French fries and would like my salad dressing "served on the side" (so you can put a measured amount on your salad).

When the waiter brings your salad, the dressing has already been poured on it. The restaurant is busy and the waiter is very occupied with several other tables. Ordinarily, you might suffer in silence, but you are learning to become more assertive. So, you wave him back to your table and politely say:

You: Waiter, I ordered the dressing on the side. Would you be so kind as to take this back and bring it the way I ordered it? (You used the wrong words. Why not simply state "Please take it back, etc."... no need for the "would you be so kind" phraseology – he is not doing you any favors. His job is to serve the way you ordered.)

The waiter takes it back, but makes sure you see his "look of annoyance." (He is beginning to manipulate you.) Now, you wait for quite a while until you get your salad served correctly and even a longer period of time until the main course arrives. You begin to wonder: "Have I offended him?"

When the waiter finally brings the main course, you notice that you got French fries. Before you can utter a word, the waiter is gone, busying himself with serving the other tables.

You grumble to yourself about the lousy service and decide you're not going to patronize this restaurant again. Yet, when the waiter comes back later and says:

Waiter: Everything all right?

You: Just fine! (You cannot afford being disliked by this waiter and want to get back in his good graces.) Your dinner will probably be highly unsatisfactory and your self-worth is deflated for not having taken any action on the second error and inquiring about the slow service.

Because you could not risk being disliked, you let yourself be manipulated upon the mistaken notion that you must never hurt other people's feelings.

Before we delineate how you can develop a greater degree of assertiveness, and before describing the components of assertive behavior with some specific organized techniques, we would like to summarize what has been said up to this point. The following table illustrates this philosophy to aid you in mastering the verbal skills necessary to halt the manipulation of your eating behavior by other individuals.

Twelve Philosophies... in a Nutshell

Manipulator's Doctrines

1. Some people are better than others.
2. Once habits are set, they can't be changed.
3. The appropriateness of your behavior must be decided by someone other than you.
4. You must justify your actions to other people.
5. Possible consequences of your actions on others must be answered by you.
6. You must make amends for your errors.
7. Once committed, you should feel guilty if you don't adhere.
8. Everything you do must be logical and fit into a slot.
9. You must automatically understand other people's needs.
10. You must solve the problems of other people.
11. You must strive for perfection as defined by others.
12. You must be liked by everyone!

Assertive Wisdom

1. As a human, you are entitled to the same rights as anyone else.
2. Learning is well worth the effort.
3. You decide what's best and take full responsibility for your actions.
4. You need not explain your behavior.
5. It's your privilege to say: "I don't know."
6. To err is human!
7. Change your mind whenever you feel like it.
8. Everything in life isn't right or wrong. There are in-betweens.
9. You have the right to question other people's motives.
10. You are not obligated to render any assistance unless you want to.
11. Nobody is perfect!
12. Your needs come first, and you have the choice to determine if they come before the good will of others.

Your demeanor is important too

We have given you the assertive philosophy in the first portion of this handout, but now you must learn how to enforce the rights we have discussed. The content of what you say is obviously important, yet there are certain non-verbal skills that you must also develop. Gestures, direct eye contact, head position and facial expressions all lend emphasis to the verbal expression. For instance, you could completely negate a serious statement of intent regarding the eating of some food if you laughed throughout your verbal communication.

The tone of voice, how loud you speak and your vocal inflections must also be appropriate. Generally, a calm, cool and collected tone of voice is best. A soft spoken monotone is as ineffective as a shouting, argumentative intonation. The latter is an aggressive manner (which is not what we are teaching) that only causes the recipient to mobilize his own defenses. We suggest you review our differentiation between assertive and aggressive behavior before you proceed to study the following techniques. Remember, the purpose is to teach you to become less inhibited, to vent your true and honest feelings and, thus, rid yourself of the guilt and anxiety which has caused you to find solace in food. It is not to get you involved in shouting arguments (aggressive behavior) which leave you in a similar state of anxiety (shouting arguments are rarely won). This would just as surely lead you down the path of inappropriate eating behavior (your only method of coping with such mental discomfort).

Technique number one: The parrot technique

We will start with this one, because, from experience, we have found it is the one most easily learned by the non-assertive person. It is so simple that it does not even require any previous rehearsal of the wording. The technique is as follows:

You keep saying what you want to say, over and over again. You say it in a calm tone of voice without getting irritated or angry. Never shout. Never expand upon or explain your statement. Imagine that you are like a parrot. The secret is persistence!

The danger to watch out for here is excess verbiage. Stick to your point. Don't give any reasons (even though the manipulator may attempt to get you to do so – see myth four). Ignore all remarks made by the manipulator. If you act like a parrot, there is a limit to the number of manipulations in the manipulator's bag of tricks. Let him display all his wares. You simply keep echoing in a smooth, unruffled voice the same words you spoke before.

Your initial reaction to this advice might be: "But I can't do that. I can't ignore his statements." What do you mean you can't? You really mean you won't! There is a difference. He is ignoring your statement. So what's wrong with ignoring his? You can hold out just as long as he can. Furthermore, you have one substantial advantage. All you have to do is to repeat the same words over again. He has to come up with new statements or arguments (bag of tricks) to try to convince you. Who is going to run out first? The answer should be quite apparent to you.

After you have mastered this simple method, a slightly more advanced technique is to stay in the conversation by agreeing or answering some of the statements of the manipulator, but always concluding your remarks with your initial repetitive assertion.

The most obvious application of this technique would be in refusing a certain food with a straightforward: "No thank you, I don't want any!" You merely repeat this in a quiet pleasant manner until the other party gives up in a discomposd and irksome state of mind (let him have the anxiety, not you). For a more complex situation, consider the following use of the parrot technique:

How to say no, and mean it

Two high school students appear at your door and wish to sell you a box of very delicious candy bars, not available in stores. You have eaten these before and liked them very much. You also know from past experience that keeping them in your house is too strong of a cue for you to cope with, and that you are very likely to go on an eating spree, consuming most of the box in one sitting. The money from the sale of the candy bars is to go towards paying for summer camp for some of the less privileged children in the high school.

Students: (After introducing themselves and indicating for what purpose the profits from the sale of the candy bars are to be used)... We are sure you would enjoy a box of these delicious candy bars, and the money goes for a good cause.

You: I understand, but I am not interested in buying any.

Students: We are certain the rest of your family would really enjoy eating them.

You: I understand, but I am not interested.

Students: But, you should consider all the benefits the underprivileged children will have from your purchase.

You: I understand, but I am not interested in buying any.

Students: Don't you care about these children from your own neighborhood?

You: I care very much, but I am not interested in buying any.

Students: All your neighbors on this block have bought at least one box. If we can get a whole solid block to buy we get an extra bonus which we plan to donate to the cause also.

You: That's very nice, but I am not interested in buying any.

Students: You would not want to be the one to keep us from earning that extra reward, would you?

You: I understand how you feel, but I am not interested in buying any.

Students: Let us ask you just one question. How old are your children?

You: I understand, but I am not interested in buying any.

Students: Won't you even tell us how old your children are?

You: I understand how you feel, but I am not interested in buying any.

Students: How come you keep repeating the same words over and over again?

You: I know how you feel, but I am just not interested in buying any.

Students: You are the only one who has not bought any of these candy bars from us.

You: I don't doubt that, but I am not interested in buying any.

Students: Do you know how many of these underprivileged students will be able to go to summer camp?

You: I understand, but I am not interested in buying any.

Students: We have been walking all day. Could we come in and get a drink of water from you?

You: I understand how you feel, but I am not interested in buying any.

Students: Do you think, perhaps, you could give some of the bars to your friends or relatives?

You: I understand how you feel, but I am not interested in buying any.

Students: Do you ever eat candy bars?

You: I am really not interested in buying any.

Students: If you bought a box from us, since it is our last stop, we would give you five extra bars free.

You: I don't doubt that, but I am not interested in buying any.

Students: Is anyone else at home who might be interested in these candy bars?

You: They might be, but I am not interested in buying any.

Students: Would you let us talk to them?

You: I am not interested.

Students: Don't you want the rest of your family to enjoy these delicious bars? You do care about the rest of your family, don't you?

You: That's true, I care about them, but I am not interested in buying any.

Students: If you won't talk to us, we'll leave.

You: I understand, but I am not interested.

Students: You are sure stubborn.

You: You are right, but I am not interested in buying any.

Students: Well, we are sure glad the other people in this neighborhood aren't as stubborn as you.

You: I am sure you are, but I am not interested in buying any.

After this the students left. They had run out of their bag of tricks. Persistence paid off using the parrot technique.

A few comments are in order in regard to this example. Notice how the students very cleverly invoked a number of the manipulator's doctrines discussed in part 1 of this handout. Myth three (appropriateness must be decided by others): All your neighbors... have bought... etc. Myth four (must explain your actions): How come you keep repeating the same words... etc. Myth five (consequences of your actions must

be answered): Don't you care about the children... etc., and... You do care about the rest of your family... etc. Myth eight (everything you do must be logical): Do you ever eat candy bars? Myth nine (you must automatically understand the problems of others): We have been walking all day... etc. Myth 10 (must solve problems of others): You... be the one to keep us... from earning... reward... etc. Myth 11 (must strive for perfections): ... other people... aren't as stubborn... etc. Myth 12 (everyone must like you): If you won't talk to us, we'll leave.

Our purpose in presenting this detailed dialogue and analysis is to show you how you can begin to recognize the various categories of manipulations. Once you perceive and identify the manipulation, it will be easier for you to cope with it by means of the various techniques we will describe for you.

The most difficult habit to break

Although we said that the parrot technique is the ideal one for the beginner, because of its simplicity, there is one problem you may have difficulty with. Namely, the compulsive habit of always responding to all of the manipulator's questions or statements. This habit is sometimes very deeply ingrained and based on the false premise that we must always automatically respond when someone else questions us. Thus, you must learn to ignore the manipulative queries and literally take charge of the conversation. That is, you must decide what you *want* to say rather than what you *should* say (here again, notice the important difference between the

words *want* and *should* – the basis of the entire assertive philosophy). There is no rule that states: "You must answer all questions that are asked of you." Instead, use the motto: "I have the right to say what I want to say, and it is my choice which questions I want to answer!"

Technique number two: Learning to use and observe "feeling talk"

This technique is slightly more difficult for the inhibited person, but it is simpler than some of those which follow. It will require some practice because past conditioning has caused a habitual self-consciousness that you must learn to overcome. The main problem of the inhibitory personality is a fear of not being accepted by her environment. This was a useful technique of coping as a youngster. If she expressed herself too freely, she was punished by the people in authority (e.g., father, mother, older brother, etc.). As an adult, however, to remain inhibitory can be catastrophic. It limits the many exciting experiences in life and causes the individual to develop an obsessive fear of her fellow person. This results in her turning to the only remaining excitement, namely, overindulgence in food. She is particularly prone to the 12th manipulator's doctrine (you must be liked by everyone). In trying to be everything to everybody, she ends up being nothing to herself. She becomes so shy, sensitive and high strung that she is always tense and does not know how to relax – except by turning to food. She is always the last to leave the elevator, is constantly apologizing for her

behavior and does not know how to respond appropriately to compliments.

The inhibitory person has constipation of her emotions. She is intellectually honest, but emotionally a liar. The courtesy she shows to others is a fraud. Her normal emotions are turned inward instead of outward and the constant suppression of her true feelings prevents her from developing honest and warm social

You do not have to respond to all of a manipulator's questions or statements.

relationships. She avoids the word "I" like the plague and instead uses phrases such as "oughtn't one" or "shouldn't one." She presents a neutral, dull and colorless personality. She is very low on the scale of self-sufficiency and is always waiting for someone else to come to the rescue – and there is usually a manipulator around to take advantage of her.

To break the chains of inhibition one must learn to express her true feelings honestly and verbally. It is possible to learn to do that, literally to loosen up, by remembering this basic technique:

Verbally communicate information about yourself. Be sure to disclose how you really think, feel and respond to another person's remarks. Be willing to share your honest feelings without fear of reprisals. It's your right to do so!

A typical example would be when someone comments how well you look in a certain dress since you have lost some weight. The inhibitory response would be: "Oh, it's nothing; just an old dress I haven't worn for some time" (that's

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not your true feeling). The proper assertive response might be: "Thank you, I appreciate your saying so. It makes me feel good to hear that my weight control efforts are beginning to become noticeable. In fact, this is a new, smaller-sized dress I just bought since my weight loss. First time in my life, I have ever been able to buy a dress right off the rack and have it fit me." We ask you now, which of these two responses would make you feel better?

The other half of this technique consists of developing the skill to pick up the cues of how another person feels from the words he speaks. You must ask yourself: "What is he really saying? What information is he giving about himself? How does he feel about what he is saying?" You then use this knowledge to prompt him to talk more about himself and the things that are important to him. Not only does this result in a more interesting two-way conversation, but he will tend to open up about himself, which directs attention away from you and allows you time to plan your strategy. Included in this category, of course, are also complimentary statements about the other person. If you like something about him, don't be afraid to say so! This can also be an excellent method of coping with a manipulator. You are literally turning the tables on him, but in a positive way. Always remember to be truthful. Express your true emotions. We are by no means recommending that you become a manipulator. We only want you to learn to assert yourself. There is a difference.

The simplest application of this technique would be for you to suddenly change the subject of the conversation by making a

complimentary remark about the other person – but, only if you really feel that way. We don't want you to lie, or make something up as a ploy to avoid a manipulation. Conversely, asserting an emotion you feel at that moment is perfectly legitimate. We have already shown you that it is your right to take charge of the conversation. You decide what you *want* to talk about, rather than what you *should* talk about. Here is an example:

Hostess: What kind of drink would you like me to fix you before we serve dinner? (In the past you have always given in to her repeated urgings, although you really did not want a drink. You also note she has a new, attractive hairdo.)

You: No, thanks, I don't feel like having a drink. Say, I really like your new hairdo. It makes you look very enticing. (You're taking charge of the conversation.)

Hostess: Oh, you really like it? I have just had it done.

You: (Using the information she has just given about herself you prompt her on). Do you have a new hairdresser?

Hostess: No, but I saw this in a magazine, showed it to my husband and ... etc. (She is very likely to go into considerable detail and open up about herself with your prompting.) It may even end up with a lively conversation about the latest trends in hair styles.

What have you accomplished with this assertion? Two things: she has probably forgotten all about forcing a drink on you and she is deeply involved with something that she has a great interest in. Result: both of you will feel better. Instead

of the usual battle of wits as to who is going to force whom to have a drink or not, you both end up expressing your feelings about a subject of mutual interest – namely, hair styles.

Application of technique 2 to myth 4

Another example: we will abbreviate: UFT (using feeling talk) and OFT (observation of FT and using the cue for prompting).

Hostess: Why don't you want any, I made it JUST FOR YOU? (OFT: what is she really saying? What feeling is she expressing with her words "just for you"? You take your cue about her feelings. She seems to be saying: "I have worked hard to make an impression on you. If you refuse me, I have been a failure in pleasing you. Your approval is important to me.")

You: I really appreciate the trouble you have taken just for me. (UFT: you really feel that, so you say it out loud. You ventilate your emotion, rather than feel guilt for not accepting and doing something you feel should do rather than want to do). I am very impressed with what you have made. It looks delicious, but I want to stay on my food program, so I'll take a rain-check this time (UFT: you are expressing your honest feelings).

Hostess: Oh, won't you just have ONE bite? One bite won't hurt you. Won't you just taste a little bit? (OFT: she needs more reassurance that you appreciate what she has done for you. She wants to prove to you she is a good hostess. So, you take your cue and respond.)

You: You are an excellent hostess. I always look forward to coming to

your home, but I also feel bad the next day when I have eaten things I shouldn't have. Your food is so good, it is just irresistible. I really would like to have a bite of it, but it is so good, I couldn't stop with one. I'd end up eating the whole thing. My figure is very important to me. The only way I can cope with your absolutely fantastic desserts is not to tempt myself by tasting them at all (UFT). You know, I also just love your new silverware. Where did you get it? (OFT: you have picked up her cue of wanting to impress you as a hostess, you notice that she needs more reassurance, and you are now taking charge of the conversation by talking about what you want to talk about and something that must be of obvious interest to her as well – the silverware.)

Hostess: I am glad you like the silverware. We picked it up on our recent trip to Denmark – we liked the modern style. (OFT: she has volunteered information about a recent trip – you take the cue.)

You: Oh, I have always wanted to go to Denmark. Did you enjoy visiting that country? (UFT: the word Denmark generates a feeling in you and you express it. OFT: you prompt her on to open up and talk about something important to her – interesting to you, too, because you want to travel there some day.)

Hostess: Yes, very much. The people are so friendly there. And, you should see the quaint shops... etc.

She will probably now go into a lively description of her experiences on that trip. You will both assertively express your feelings about travel to foreign countries and both feel better for it. You have

avoided a manipulation and turned it into an interesting evening. Note the difference between this dialogue and the previous one. Same situation, but a much happier ending for all concerned.

Technique Number Three: Agreeing with the truth of criticism

Although this requires a bit more skill than the techniques we have described so far, this is the one you can have the most fun with. The reason for this is that you literally give the manipulator a taste of his own medicine. This will result in his getting extremely frustrated, until he finally gives up in complete despair. This is a far cry from your own usual negative response to his critical remarks. The main skill involved with this technique is learning to listen to the exact words the manipulator is using. You must respond to what is actually being said – NOT to what you think is implied by the statement. If you respond to the implication, you're being manipulated. You must learn to respond to the actual words! This point is best clarified with the following few examples:

Husband: You ate the dessert again, and you know that's not on your diet.

You: Yes dear, that's true. I did eat the dessert again.

Notice, you responded to the truth of the statement – to the actual words. The implication is: If you wouldn't make such a pig of yourself, you wouldn't be so fat. You're just a failure and should feel guilty. You do not respond to what's implied, only to the facts. You don't

say: Yes, I just can't control myself. In fact, your statement implies: Okay, so what? It's my problem and not yours. I am working on it and I don't have to account to you for my errors. It's really none of your business. It's my problem and I am responsible for finding a solution. Now, consider a slightly different wording:

Husband: You know how important your figure is to you. If you keep eating these desserts that are not on your diet you'll always be fat and unhappy. Don't you want to be thin?

You: You are right, I do want to be thin and my figure is important to me. What you say makes sense. Even so, I expect to be eating desserts occasionally. When I feel that I can only cope with my weight problem by never eating desserts, I'll do so.

Notice that you responded by agreeing in principle, but not with the implication that "You must be perfect and never make mistakes." Also, remember assertive wisdom No. 8: Everything in life is not either right or wrong – there are in-betweens. Now, let's take one more type of statement in a similar situation to show you how you should agree.

Husband: Honey, if you wouldn't be eating this dessert right now, you wouldn't be so fat.

You: I agree with you. That's probably true. You could be right about the effect it has on my obesity problem.

In this instance you have agreed with the possible truth of the statement. Your husband accused you of wrongdoing and implied that

HOW THE OBESE PERSON COPES WITH CRITICISM

you are a weak, no-good failure. Instead of trying to justify, argue or express how guilty you feel about it (thus, giving your husband more ammunition for further derogatory remarks), you are agreeing with the possibility. Ordinarily you might have responded with a non-assertive statement such as: "That's true, it's really very stupid of me to eat that dessert." On the other hand, you might have responded in an aggressive

(not assertive) manner by saying: What do you know about it? Are you a doctor? Why don't you leave me alone and mind your own business? Such aggressive remarks are very likely to lead to an argument with your husband and end up with you feeling tense, nervous and guilty – a state of mind not conducive to the self-control required of any effective weight control program.

It's the ideal way to cope with criticism

The obese person's method of handling criticism will ordinarily consist of three types of responses. We list them in the above yellow table and indicate why they are ineffective.

Handling Method:

1. Attempts to justify his behavior (Myth Four: You must explain your behavior to other people).
2. He categorically denies his error. (Lacking the ability to give an adequate reason for his behavior, he resorts to denying that an error ever occurred.)
3. He automatically accepts the statement of wrongful behavior based on the manipulator's arbitrary rules of what's right or wrong and uses counter criticism of something in the behavior of the manipulator. (This is the obese person's method of diverting attention away from his error – tagged as wrong in the arbitrary right/wrong scale).

Ineffective because:

1. The obese person has been ingrained with the idea that his reasons for doing something have to be logical and be able to literally stand up in court.
2. The denial of the error is obviously not true (the act speaks for itself, it has occurred and cannot be denied). It's defensive but a lie.
3. Finding fault with the criticizer is of itself a manipulative act. We are not recommending that you become a manipulator, but instead learn to be an assertive individual.

These three coping methods have one thing in common. They tend to counterattack the statements of the manipulator. You are therefore furnishing him with further ammunition for more criticism. This invariably leads to more defensiveness, denial and destructive remarks which produce a vicious cycle which escalates into anger and emotionally crushing arguments.

The **AWC technique (Agreeing With the Truth of Criticism)** removes the striking surface of the manipulator. If you do not furnish him with more material to strike back at, his manipulative criticism of you or your behavior is diluted to the point of utter futility. Thus, the manipulator finally gives up in smothered despair. You have defeated his attempts to manipulate

you by his critical statements, and you have done so without being aggressive or manipulative, but by being assertive. Let us illustrate how you could respond to a simple criticism with the usual three methods, and then compare it to the assertive AWC technique.

Statement: I think you are just a big fat slob, with no self control.

Justifying answer: I just don't have any will power and can't help myself. (Plenty of ammunition here for him to strike back at.)

Denial answer: I am not a big fat slob. That's a nasty thing for you to say and I have just as much self-control as anyone else. (Lots of things he can criticize from that statement.)

Counter-criticism answer: Look who is talking. You're not so neat yourself. You smoke like a stove pot, cough all the time and pollute the air. Speaking about self-control, people in glass houses shouldn't throw stones. (You are starting something that is bound to end up in argument which will leave both of you angry.)

Assertive AWC answer: I can see why you think that way. I probably could improve my self-control. (You are agreeing with his thinking and the probability that self-control could be improved. Is there anyone who could not improve self-control? So, you are agreeing in principle with his statement – not with the inference).

Recapitulation and sample dialogue of AWC

Be sure to be a good listener when having criticisms thrown at you. Listen to the actual words. Respond only to the statement and not what is implied by it. When you agree with the statement, you may agree with one of three aspects of the criticism:

1. You may agree with the truth of the criticism (if there is any truth in it).
2. You may agree with the statement in principle (if there is any general truth in it).
3. You may agree with the possibility of the statement (you can agree with the odds, most things are possible and thus there may be some truth in a statement, perhaps 1 in a 100).

In the following application of the AWC technique, notice how the manipulator becomes more and more frustrated because he runs out of things to strike back at. You don't supply him with the hard psychological striking surface which he is desperately seeking. Lacking such, he has no other choice but to give up, similar to the result of the Parrot Technique.

Spouse: The way you look really embarrasses me when we go out in public.

You: I can see why you feel that way (AWC).

Spouse: You are so fat, you always dress in these loose-fitting clothes to hide your ugly bulges.

You: You are right, loose fitting clothes hide excess fat more effectively than other types of clothing. (AWC).

Spouse: You always look like you are wearing a night gown instead of street clothes like other people.

You: They do look like a night gown, don't they? (AWC).

Spouse: If you'd lose some weight you wouldn't look like a bum and could wear some nicer clothes.

You: That's true, I could wear other clothes. (AWC).

Spouse: That dress you are wearing right now looks like a potato sack that's been dyed, it has no shape at all.

You: It does look like a sack, doesn't it?

Spouse: Anyone who has to dress like that ought to hide in a dark closet where no one will see her.

You: You're right, I do have a number of faults. (AWC).

Spouse: Calling them faults is the understatement of the year.

You: I can see why you feel that way. (AWC).

Spouse: And look at your chin. It's so fat, it looks like you have an extra bag there to carry your food in.

You: Yes, I do have a double chin. (AWC).

Spouse: And, your rear end – it's so big, I am surprised you can fit into a chair when we go out to the theater.

You: That's true, I do feel uncomfortable when the chair is not big enough for me. (AWC).

Spouse: Just look at your legs. They look like a couple of bowling pins. They just look awful.

You: You are right. My legs are not one of my strong points. (AWC).

Spouse: One of your strong points? Heavens, I'd like to know what strong points you do have?

You: You're right. I do have a lot of faults. (AWC).

Spouse: Lots of faults? I would say you're just one big fault.

You: You might be right. There are a lot of areas in which I could improve. (AWC).

Spouse: Don't you care what you look like?

You: Yes, I care very much what I look like.

Spouse: You talk like you don't feel guilty about your looks.

You: You are right. I don't feel guilty. (AWC).

Spouse: That's a terrible attitude to have. You should feel guilty about how fat you are and how you embarrass me in public.

You: You are probably right. I could feel guiltier. (AWC).

Spouse: If you had any moral sense of responsibility about our marriage, you'd go on a diet and lose some weight.

You: True, I could go on a diet and lose some weight. (AWC).

Spouse: You sure look upset when I tell you how ugly your excess fat makes you look.

You: I'm sure I look that way to you. (AWC).

Spouse: You shouldn't get upset when I tell you that, but should do something about it.

You: That's true, I should do something about it (AWC).

Spouse: Then why don't you do something?

You: I agree with you. I should do something about it. (AWC).

Spouse: No one else would tell you the truth about your looks except

me. So, you ought to appreciate what I am trying to do for you.

You: I'm sure you are right about that. (AWC).

Spouse: You don't have to get sarcastic about it, you know.

You: Yes, you are right. I don't have to be sarcastic. (AWC).

Spouse: You are hopeless. You'll always be fat.

You: I can see why you feel that way. (AWC).

Spouse: You are just too weak ever to be thin.

You: You may be right. I may never be thin. (AWC).

Spouse: When I said that, you rubbed your chin, because you know I am right.

You: You are correct. I did rub my chin. (AWC).

Spouse: You just did it again. I can tell when you're getting upset.

You: That's true, I did it again. (AWC).

Spouse: And you stopped doing it when I pointed it out to you, because it makes you nervous.

You: Yes, I did stop, didn't I? (AWC).

Spouse: You were laughing at me when you said that.

You: You may be right. (AWC).

Spouse: You shouldn't laugh at serious things like that, especially when I tell you what's good for you.

You: That's right. It is a serious matter. (AWC).

Spouse: All you are doing is agreeing with me.

You: That's true. (AWC).

Spouse: You sound like a "yes-person" with no opinions of your own. That must be because you know what I say about your overweight is correct.

You: That's true. I do sound like that to you, don't I? (AWC).

Spouse: You not only sound like one. You are one.

You: You may be correct about that. (AWC).

Spouse: You see what I mean? You're doing it again. You can only respond by agreeing with me.

You: That's right. I am doing it again. (AWC).

Spouse: I don't think you can say anything but "yes" to my remarks about your obesity.

You: I can understand why you believe that. (AWC).

Spouse: Can't you make an intelligent reply to my criticism?
You: Perhaps I can. (AWC).

Spouse: Don't you know if you can reply intelligently?

You: Well, why don't we wait and see if I can? (AWC).

Spouse: I just can't get through to you.

You: I can see why you feel that way. (AWC).

Spouse: Well, I think you're overdoing this "yes" thing.

You: You may be right. I probably am overdoing it. (AWC).

Spouse: Oh, I give up. I just get all tense and upset when I talk to you.

You: I am sorry you feel that way. (AWC).

Spouse: Oh, be quiet. I just don't know what else to tell you.

The above dialogue has been rather lengthy, but we wanted to stress the point of its effectiveness, no matter how nasty the remarks of the manipulator might become. He has no choice but to come up with more and more critical statements in an attempt to provoke you into a defensive pronouncement which he can then attack. Lacking such, his critique dies of a deliberate and agonizing death. All this, without your shouting, arguing or uttering a single offensive word. Try it, you'll like it!

If you still have some reservations about using this very potent technique because you feel that you are not being sincere by agreeing with criticism, remember, you are only agreeing with any truth, principle or probability in the manipulator's statements. Furthermore, don't get caught in the all-or-none trap (fully sincere or not sincere at all). May we once more remind you that there are in-betweens! We started out our description of this technique by saying this is the one you will have

the most fun with. We would like to end on a similar note. It does require some skill (listening to the exact words) – and have fun using it!



Technique number four: Actively prompting the critic

The previous technique is extremely effective when dealing with individuals who attempt to manipulate you by criticizing your behavior. With the AWC technique you can rapidly set up a psychological block which completely thwarts any attempts to make you do what the other person thinks you should do rather than what you want to do. Nevertheless, when dealing with people with whom you have daily close personal contact (e.g., close friends, spouse, parent, etc.), it is often more desirable to change them to become more assertive rather than manipulative. That way, you will be able to find out what is really bugging them. What are their real reasons for trying to manipulate you? Once you find out what really bothers a person, you can arrive at a compromise solution that will bring better harmony to your relationship with him. You will both be able to vent your true feelings, instead of each trying to get his own way by making the other one feel guilty.

The technique you use is very similar to the second part of technique number two (observe “feeling talk”), except here you prompt the other person to expand upon his criticism of your behavior. Just as you listened for cues and then encouraged the individual to ventilate his feelings when using the “feeling talk” technique, so you take your cue from the criticism he offers and evoke more information regarding his true feelings about his critical remarks. It is important, however, that you do it in a non-defensive, low-key manner. Under no circumstances must you be counter-manipulative. After all, you

are trying to convert his remarks from manipulative ones to assertive ones so that you can both deal with the problem out in the open – with neither party being accused of wrongdoing by the other. Remember, the right or wrong of an action must be decided by the individual acting it out, not by another person. You are the final judge of your actions. Each individual is responsible for deciding upon the appropriateness of his behavior and takes full responsibility for his actions (Assertive Wisdom No. 3).

In eliciting more information about the criticism, you must be sure to point the finger at yourself, not at the critic. If you do the latter, you are being defensive and hostile (which is not assertive), and your remarks are bound to be interpreted as either sarcasm or as an attempt to scoff and humiliate. This is such an important aspect of the PTC (Prompting The Critic) technique. In the following simple remarks, a similar thought is expressed, but in the first instance it is defensive; in the second instance it is assertive (non-critical and non-aggressive).

Criticism: Are you going to spend more money by going to the doctor again for another weight reducing attempt?

Defensive reply: What makes you think going to the doctor to lose weight is so terrible?

Assertive PTC reply: I don't understand. What is it about my consulting the doctor for my weight problem that is so bad?

The first response is very likely to provoke hostile feelings in the critic. It implies: “It's none of your damn business what I do with my

money. Who do you think you are anyway, to try to tell me what to do?”

The second response implies an entirely different thought: “Please tell me what you don't like about my going to the doctor. Let's examine what might be wrong with my doing so?” This response is much more apt to encourage the critic to divulge what is really bothering him about your behavior. You are requesting more information in an unemotional manner. As he supplies this information, you can continue further prompting until the real conflict is out in the open and a mutually agreeable solution can be worked out in a mature, quiet and non-argumentative setting. Thus, attacks and counterattacks are avoided. The most difficult part of this technique is that you must avoid verbal replies which may, in fact, be thinly-veiled, aggressive statements. Note the carefully worded replies in the following series of criticisms.

Spouse: Are you going to spend more money by going to the doctor again for another weight reducing attempt?

You: I don't understand. What is it about my consulting the doctor for my weight problem that's bad? (PTC)

Spouse: You have done it so many times before and you always regain your weight. It's just a waste of our money.

You: What is it I am doing that wastes our money? (PTC)

Spouse: Well, you spend all this money to lose weight. Then you stop going after you have lost some

weight. You never finish what you started. When you regain your weight, you are right back where you started and all the money you spent on reducing has gone down the drain.

You: What is it about spending money on my weight reduction attempts that annoys you? (PTC)

Spouse: We could be spending it for more useful purposes.

You: For what other purposes would you like to spend the money I am spending on my weight reducing? (PTC)

Spouse: Well, I have been meaning to get some new fishing gear and whenever you dip into our savings for another weight reducing attempt I have to put it off.

You: If we bought you some new fishing gear, would it bother you for me to spend money for my weight problem? (PTC)

Spouse: No, I guess that would be all right. I do like you when you are thinner.

You: Do you want me to continue to get down to a more attractive figure, even though it means paying for professional help? (PTC)

Spouse: Yes, I wouldn't mind if you would just stay with it.

You: I guess I don't usually stay with it long enough to get any meaningful results, do I? (PTC)

Spouse: You sure don't. You are just too flighty. When I make up my mind to do something, I finish it. You never finish anything you start.

You: How could I improve myself in that department? (PTC)

Spouse: You should make a definite commitment to stay with a program for at least a year. Then stick to it.

You: Well, let me get this straight. Are you saying, you would not mind my spending money on my obesity if I stuck with it for a longer period of time? (PTC)

Spouse: That's right. At least, it will show you mean business this time. Actions speak louder than words, you know.

You: What else is bad about my going to the doctor to lose weight? (PTC)

Spouse: Well, when you go on one of those diets, you are always so irritable. You are almost impossible to live with.

You: I don't understand, dear. What do I do that makes me impossible to live with? (PTC)

Spouse: Well, for one thing, you become very short-tempered. You tend to nag and get upset over the slightest things.

You: It sounds like you are saying I pick on you too much when I am dieting. Is that right? (PTC)

Spouse: Exactly! Nothing that I do suits you. You can always find faults with everything I do.

You: Is there anything else that I do that makes me hard to live with when I am dieting? (PTC)

Spouse: Well, our sex life suffers when you are on a diet.

You: What is it about our sex life that is unsatisfactory when I am dieting?

Spouse: Well, you never seem to be in the mood for sex when you are on a diet.

You: Are you saying, we don't have sex often enough?

Spouse: That's exactly what I am saying.

You: When we do have sex, is it satisfactory? (PTC)

Spouse: Yes, it's okay, but we don't have it as often as when you are not dieting.

You: Is our frequency of sexual relations adequate when I am not dieting?

Spouse: Yes, it's fine then.

You: Is there anything else that I do when going to the doctor to lose weight besides letting our sexual relationship decline? (PTC)

Spouse: As a matter of fact there is. You bring all this diet food in the house, and there is nothing decent for me to eat. I don't have to watch my weight, you know, so why should I have to eat differently when you are on a diet?

You: What foods do you miss when I am on a diet? (PTC)

Spouse: Well, it is mainly ice cream. I like to have my ice cream every night after dinner.

You: Are there any other foods that you would like to have available when I am dieting? (PTC)

Spouse: No, that's the main one.

You: Will you tell me some more things that are disturbing when I am going on a diet?

Spouse: No, that's about it.

You: Okay, let me see. It sounds like you want to get your new fishing gear that you have been putting off getting. You do want me to be thin and don't mind my spending the money if I will make the time commitment and then stick with it. Right? (PTC)

Spouse: Correct.

You: And you want me to make a special effort to avoid complaining about things you do, which I don't fret about when I am not dieting. Furthermore, you want us to continue the frequency of our sexual relations as always and be sure that you can have ice cream after supper. Is that right? (PTC)

Spouse: That about sums it up pretty well.

You: Then, as long as we take care of these other problems you don't mind my going to the doctor at all? (PTC)

Spouse: No, not at all. In fact, I want you to go. You are so much more attractive when you are thin.

You: Okay, you're on!

Notice that you have accomplished several important objectives with the PTC technique. You have brought matters out in the open – you have disclosed what is really bothering your mate about your proposal to undertake a medically-supervised weight control program. Additionally, you have learned to desensitize yourself to criticism from someone you care

about. You have done it in a non-hostile and non-defensive style which will tend to extinguish future manipulative criticisms from a person with whom you have daily contact, and whose remarks have previously induced anxiety and frustration in you. But most important of all, you are beginning to teach your mate to become more assertive. You have encouraged him to say what he wants rather than to continue his manipulative endeavors, attempting to impose his arbitrary right/wrong structure on you, and thus have you change your behavior.

Now that you know exactly what the problem is, a mutually agreeable solution can be worked out. A type of compromise answer to the dispute will be discussed in greater detail in our description of the sixth technique, entitled the **MAS technique (Mutually Agreeable Solution)**.

Technique Number Five: Error acceptance

So far, we have given you methods of coping with criticism by recognizing the arbitrary right/wrong structure it imposes upon your behavior with implications that what you did was wrong (not just a mistake – mistakes are not necessarily wrong – you're the judge of that, not other people). Although a critic does not openly say so, he insinuates that you ought to feel guilty about what you did (Myth eight: Everything you do is either right or wrong). These techniques will train you to realize that making a mistake is not synonymous with the word wrong. They will teach you to distinguish between the truth about your performance and the

arbitrary right or wrong that is tacked on by the manipulator's remarks.

But what do you do when you have made an error which you feel (in your own judgment) really is wrong? How do you keep your self-respect and dignity when you feel that you are guilty of a mistake about which there can be no doubt? How do you overcome your automatically learned response of seeking forgiveness and atoning for actions that in your own judgment have a sinful tenor to them? The answer lies in the words "learned response." The belief that errors are wrong has been instilled since childhood. It is a learned response. As in the other methods for coping with the manipulator's doctrines and establishing belief in assertive wisdom, the most effective formula for changing a destructive conviction is to learn a new and different verbal coping response. Practicing such new verbal behavior will result in the necessary emotional change and rid you of the childish belief that you must feel guilty about your mistakes. Can you imagine what would happen if a scientist felt guilty every time he made a mistake or miscalculation while performing an intricate experiment? It would completely stifle all progress. You must adopt the scientist's frame of mind: A mistake is exactly that – a mistake – nothing more and nothing less! It's not a sin, not a crime and not a sacrilege! There is absolutely nothing immoral or evil about it!

Applying this attitude to your verbal skills, you simply state in a matter-of-fact manner that there is something negative about your behavior. Errors are just errors! You have made a mistake, and you say so – without guilt and without

remorse. We have called this the technique of **Error Acceptance (abbreviated: EA)**.

A few typical “EA” verbal responses

Suppose you and a dieting friend meet once a week to discuss your progress and the past seven days’ performance.

Friend: You didn’t adhere to your diet very well this past week.

You: You’re right. I didn’t do too well, did I? (EA)

Friend: If you had kept the ice cream out of the house you wouldn’t have binged last Tuesday and ended up eating the whole quart.

You: Yes, I realize that was a dumb thing to do. I just shouldn’t buy things that I can’t handle yet. Exposing myself to them is a mistake. I must avoid them completely if I am going to be successful. (EA)

Friend: And that new dress you bought is about a size too small for you. You’re bulging out all over.

You: I’ve noticed that. I do look pretty bad in it, don’t I? Buying a smaller size was just wishful thinking on my part. (EA)

Friend: In fact, it makes you look like a hot dog that’s been squeezed into a skin that’s too small for it.

You: I agree. It was stupid of me to think that I could wear a dress like that. I don’t like the way I look in it myself either. (EA)

Friend: Also, that party you went to last Friday was a mistake. What ever made you think you could stay on your diet with all that food around?

You: I know. I worried about going to that party all week long. When I decided to go after all, I really goofed. (EA)

Friend: That new hair style you got makes your face look real round. It makes you look heavy.

You: I know what you mean. I realized that after I had it done. This new style just doesn’t suit me, does it? (EA) At first glance these verbal responses might seem very similar to the AWC technique (Agreeing With the Truth of Criticism). However, there is a fine line which differentiates these two techniques. In the AWC response you agree with the truth, general principle or probability of a statement. When using the EA technique you agree with the reality of your having made a mistake (this one involves judgment – yours) whereas with the AWC technique you only stick to the actuality of your behavior. Nonetheless, when you admit the error, it’s only that – an error and nothing more. There is no guilt attached to it. When you stated: “that was a dumb thing to do,” you expressed an admission of an error, not one of guilt. All of us do dumb things at times. There is nothing wrong with that. No one is perfect – remember Assertive Wisdom No. 6 (To err is human!).

Technique Number Six: Mutually agreeable solution

We have left the discussion of this technique for last because it is often the last

one you will use during a verbal interchange. Obviously, no matter how skillful you become with the first five techniques, you will not always be successful in getting what you want 100 percent of the time. Nevertheless, the purpose of becoming more assertive in food-related situations is to maintain your self-respect and avoid feeling inferior, anxious and nervous. Although you may not always achieve your goal exactly as you had planned, at least your feeling of self-worth will not suffer, as it invariably does when you act in an inhibited nonassertive manner. That state of mind will lead you to find comfort in food, which is exactly what we want to avoid.

Your assertiveness accomplishes its main objective by compelling the manipulator to realize that he cannot affect your behavior by making you feel guilty with his multiple insinuations, hints and attempts to intimidate you. By expressing your right to be thin in non-militant terms, without being antagonistic and belligerent (aggressive behavior), you literally force your manipulator to lay his cards on the table. If he wants you to act differently, he must voice his own wants and desires and give the conflict of interest a good airing – but not in a quarrelsome fashion. This tends to bring the problem out in the open. It can now be dealt with in a mature and adult fashion.

It is at this point that you offer a reconciliation to the real issues. At the same time, such an accommodation must under no circumstances degrade your feeling of self-worth. The conflict is resolved, not by clash of personalities (who is the stronger of the two?), but only on the material objectives of the dispute. The

controversy is then settled, based on a jointly suitable agreement.

The **MAS technique (Mutually Agreeable Solution)** is designed to bring the manipulator to the point of saying: “Okay, make me an offer.” Or, such an attitude not forthcoming, when you feel the time is ripe, when the real issues have been exposed, you say: “All right, here is my offer.” It is merely a bargaining technique. You can always negotiate for materialistic concessions. That’s what life is all about. Yet, your self-respect is never negotiable. The discord must never be settled by who is the better manipulator, only by a correspondent arbitration of compatible worldly consequences. We will use some of the examples we have previously cited in this text to illustrate this point.

For instance, in the dialogue with your mother-in-law, after you discovered her wish to impress the family with her culinary skills, you might make the following offer:

You: All right, mother. I tell you what. So that you can demonstrate your expertise in making lasagna, as only you can make it, on your last day here, for your farewell dinner, make us a dish of this, in limited portion size, to go along with the rest of the meal. (MAS)

In the example of the students selling their candy bars at your door you might suggest:

You: Why don’t you speak to your superiors and consider selling a non-food item next year to promote your cause? Come back with that and I might be willing to help you out by buying one or several. (MAS)

In the example where your husband criticizes you eating the dessert, you could reply:

You: We are both after the same goal. I want to be thin and you want an attractive wife. So why don’t we make an agreement to eat only fruit for dessert for the next month. I won’t buy anything else but fruit to keep in the house, so there won’t be any temptation for me to eat “empty calorie” foods. Besides, it will probably benefit both of us to have a more healthful diet by keeping these “junk foods” out of the house. (MAS)

At the conclusion of the dialogue during which your mate criticizes your baggy dresses, you may wish to propose the following offer:

You: There is a very attractive dress displayed in the window at ... (local dress shop). If you’ll buy me that dress, I’ll make a real serious attempt to get my weight down so that I can wear it. I can’t promise anything, except that I will really make an effort to stick by the program. I think that dress will motivate me sufficiently so that I will succeed this time. (MAS)

The illustration we used for the PTC technique is a perfect example of finding out what the problem really is. Your last statement of: “Okay, you’re on!” could be changed to or followed by these remarks:

You: Next weekend, let’s look for some new fishing gear for you. I am also going to make myself as attractive as possible for you, as I am losing, to enhance our sex life. I am also going to buy you some ice

cream, which we can keep locked up in a special container in the freezer, so only you can get at it. Then next week, I am going to the doctor to start on a new weight reduction program. How does that sound to you? (MAS)

To be sure, all your offers are not always going to be immediately accepted. What you simply do then is to make another offer. If you have caused the manipulator to become more assertive through verbal skills, he may present you with a counter-offer. Be that as it may, at least you are now bargaining on the real issues. No longer are you each trying to get the other to do what you want with manipulative techniques, but you are now making an adjustment in your respective wishes to reach a compatible solution. This will make for a much more harmonious relationship – one in which you each know where you stand in respect to each other. Eventually, you will reach a mutually agreeable solution (MAS).

The six techniques in a nutshell

Before presenting a composite dialogue to illustrate how these various techniques can be used in a combined and structured way, we would like to summarize the six basic assertive techniques for coping with people who endeavor to undermine your weight control program. We suggest you study the following table carefully for purposes of review. Moreover, we urge you to use the table as a quick and ready source of reference in developing your assertive skills.

Coping with Manipulators of Your Weight Control Effort: 6 Techniques

1. Parrot Technique
2. Feeling Talk “FT”
3. Agreeing with Criticism “AWC”
4. Prompting the Critic “PTC”
5. Error Acceptance “EA”
6. Mutually Agreeable Solution “MAS”

Persistent unruffled repetition of the same words, without deviation from what you want to say, until manipulator exhausts his “bag of tricks.”

Use UFT: Say how you really think and feel. Express honest feelings without fear of reprisal. Take charge of the conversation!

Use: OFT: Listen for cues to information other people give about themselves and prompt them on to reveal more of their true feelings.

You agree with the truth, principle or the possibility of criticism— not what is implied! Carefully listen to exact words and respond only to what is actually being said. Don’t justify, deny or find fault, and thus furnish a “striking surface” to the manipulator.

Requesting more information about the critical statement by actively prompting the manipulator, in a non-hostile manner, to bring the real conflict out in the open.

Mistakes are not synonymous with “wrong.” Agree with the reality of

having made an error – without guilt! Admit in a matter-of-fact manner that there is something negative about your behavior.

After the true conflict has been revealed, “make an offer” and bargain on the real issues as long as your self-respect is not involved. Your feeling of self-worth is never negotiable!

A composite dialogue

In order to exemplify how all of the six techniques can be utilized, we will describe a situation which we have found to be one of the most troublesome for them to cope with. Up to now, we have cited examples which limited themselves to the use of only one technique. Now that you have familiarized yourself with each of these techniques, we would like to show you how they are actually best utilized in combination for most effectiveness.

Suppose that you have an extremely overbearing mother who manages to fulfill her demands by crafty manipulation of your behavior. Her methods are sometimes cunning, sometimes crude, but always designed to induce in you feelings of guilt and anxiety unless you give in to her wishes. Furthermore, both she and your dad tend to push food whenever you visit them. Your relationship with your parents has always undermined past weight control efforts. You have tried being aggressive with them, but this has always culminated in painful arguments which left everyone resentful and irritated. On your arrival home from these encounters,

you usually feel so frustrated that it triggers a spree of binge eating. You do not wish to destroy the relationship with your parents. At the same time, you do not wish to run away from it (as all your siblings have). Yet, things simply cannot go on as they have or you will continue to gain weight, something that has caused considerable friction between you and your spouse. It is now the week before Thanksgiving, and you feel very strongly that you will have to avoid another confrontation. Past experience has shown that Thanksgiving dinner at your parent’s house has always terminated in the inevitable tragic mishap.

You have just picked up your ringing telephone:

You: Hello.

Mother: Hello, dear. This is your mother.

You: How are you mother?

Mother: Not too well, dear. This weather, at this time of year is really not good for me.

You: Gosh, mother, I am sorry to hear that. How is the weather bothering you? (UFT, OFT) (Please note that the word sorry is generally not a good word to have in your vocabulary while training to become more assertive. The word sorry implies guilt – although in this instance it is more a matter of expression. Nevertheless, it would have been better to use the words “I am sad to hear that.” That phrase really expresses your true feelings more accurately.)

Mother: Well, it's my arthritis that has flared up, as it always does at this time of the year. Oh, I do hope to see you soon when you come over for Thanksgiving dinner. (Notice the subtle manipulation. Your refusal to come over to see her would induce more guilt feelings since she is suffering the pains of arthritis.)

You: I can see how your arthritis can flare up with this moist weather, mother, and I hope that you will get better very soon, but we are not coming to see you this Thanksgiving day. There are some other things we want to do this year. (AWC, UFT)

Mother: What can be more important than seeing your parents on Thanksgiving day? (She is beginning to start her manipulative approach in getting her way with you.)

You: I realize how you feel, mother, but my husband and I will not be coming over to see you this year for Thanksgiving dinner. (UFT, Parrot)

Mother: (With a peppery tone in her voice) Dearest, you are speaking to your mother! We always have Thanksgiving dinner together at our house. (Doctrines 3 and 8)

You: Yes, we always have in the past. I also know that I must sound somewhat disrespectful to you, yet we will not be seeing you for Thanksgiving this year. (AWC, EA, Parrot)

Mother: I have already bought a large turkey for us and all the trimmings to go with it – and, you

know how much you like the way I fix it for you. (Doctrines 5 and 10)

You: I didn't know that you had already bought food for the dinner. And, yes, I do like the way you fix it. In fact, too much so. I always overeat when I am at your house. (UFT, AWC, EA)

Mother: What are we going to do with all this food that we bought? You know how much your dad has to scrimp and save every penny he earns to make ends meet.

You: I don't know what you are going to do with the food, mother. I also know you have to watch your budget closely. (UFT, AWC)

Mother: We can't eat it all by ourselves, you know. (Doctrine 10)

You: I am certain you can't, mother. (AWC)

Mother: We bought all this food just for you. (Doctrine 5)

You: I am sure you did. (AWC)

Mother: When your dad finds out that you are not coming – he will be very upset.

You: I am sure you are right. Dad will be upset, but we will not see you for Thanksgiving dinner this year. (AWC, Parrot)

Mother: What's happened to you? That's not my daughter speaking. Why are you turning on your parents like this. We aren't going to live forever, you know, and this may be one of the last Thanksgivings that you can spend with both of your parents. (She is really piling it

on thick now, literally throwing the book at you.)

You: That's true, no one lives forever, and I know it must be lonely for you two to spend the holiday without us, but we won't be over to see you for dinner this year. (AWC, UFT, Parrot)

Mother: When your sister and her husband lived here in town they would always come over for Thanksgiving. Actually, they came over to see us every chance they got. We did not even have to invite them. (Doctrine 3)

You: Yes mother, you're right. They did spend a lot of time with you and furnished you with much companionship, but we won't be over this year. (AWC, Parrot)

Mother: You just shouldn't treat your parents this way. You: What am I doing wrong, mother? (PTC)

Mother: Not spending Thanksgiving dinner at our house.

You: What is it about our not spending Thanksgiving at your house that is wrong? (PTC)

Mother: A devoted daughter should see her parents every chance she gets, especially over Thanksgiving.

You: What is it about not seeing you this Thanksgiving that makes me not be a devoted daughter? (PTC)

Mother: If you really loved me, you would jump at the chance to see your mother on Thanksgiving day.

You: What is it about my not wanting to be with you next Thursday that indicates that I don't love you? (PTC)

Mother: I never heard a daughter talk to her mother like that.

You: I don't understand, what do you mean?

Mother: A daughter shouldn't talk back to her own mother. That's being disrespectful to your parents.

You: What is it about my talking back to you that's disrespectful? (PTC)

Mother: As long as I have known you, you have never talked back to me like this. (Doctrine 8)

You: You are correct, mother. I have never talked back to you like this, have I? (AWC)

Mother: It's your husband's influence on you. Ever since you married him, you have changed.

You: That's true. I have changed since I married him. But I don't understand, what is it about the way I have changed, that's wrong? (AWC, PTC)

Mother: I don't think he likes us, and he is making you choose between us and him.

You: You may be right, mother. There is probably some dissension between him and you. Even so, I was the one who decided that we would not see you for Thanksgiving dinner this year. (AWC, UFT, Parrot)

Mother: I just don't understand how you can act that way. After the many things we have done for you in bringing you up and putting you through school. With your father's modest income, it was a real hardship on us to give you a good education, nice clothes and all the things you always wanted. (How can you avoid guilt feelings with all that? Are you an ungrateful daughter?)

You: I can see why you feel that way. I really appreciate all the things you two have done for me. You have been very good parents to me, and I know that the money you spent for my education was money you could have spent for other things. (AWC, UFT)

Mother: So, if you really appreciate us that much, why don't you show it? (Doctrine 9)

You: In what way should I show my appreciation of you? (PTC)

Mother: By spending Thanksgiving with us and brightening that day for us.

You: I am sure it would enliven your day if we came over, but we are not going to see you for Thanksgiving this year. (AWC, Parrot)

Mother: It sounds as though you don't want to be with us.

You: Well, not this Thanksgiving. (UFT, Parrot)

Mother: What have we done to make you mad at us?

You: I am not mad at you, mother. But I do get annoyed at you

sometimes when you won't take "no" for an answer. Sometimes, you just keep pushing me to do things I really don't want to do. I realize, of course, that you mean well, and it's stupid of me to get so upset about it. Yet, it still irritates me. (UFT, EA, UFT)

Mother: (Now in tears, audibly sobbing over the phone) I am sorry to have upset you so. I just want us to be together more, so that I can enjoy my own daughter. I don't want us to grow apart from each other.

You: I agree. I want us to remain close also. But now that I am married and have my own family, we have our own lives to lead, too. That means I can't always do what you want me to do. I wish there were a way to say "no" to you without hurting your feelings. Is there a better way I could do it? (AWC, UFT, EA, PTC)

Mother: Well, you don't have to get nasty with me when you don't want to do something I ask of you.

You: Correct. I don't have to get nasty when I say "no" to you. If you don't push me too hard, I'll try very hard to be extra nice to you, okay? (AWC, MAS)

Mother: Do you mean by that, that you'll never see us for any of the holiday dinners? (Doctrine 7)

You: I can see how you get that notion, but I don't mean to hurt your feelings. I have to learn to live my own life. I am a mature adult now and can't be tied to your apron strings any longer. Once I realize that I can run my own life the way I want to, that I am my own boss, I

won't feel so overburdened and obligated. When I can make my own decisions without feeling guilty about them I'll be able to handle dinners and other food exposures much more effectively. You know how important my figure and health are to me. (AWT, UFT, EA, UFT)

Mother: You sure don't sound like my little daughter talking any more. You know how much I like to hear from you, even if you just call me on the telephone.

You: Yes, that's true mother. I am no longer a little girl, but a fully grown adult with my own husband and family. (Now, picking up the cue – OFT – from her statement, you “make an offer” – MAS) I'll call you next week and wish you both a happy Thanksgiving day. Would you like that? (AWC, OFT, MAS)

Mother: Yes, that would be nice. Will you promise to do so?

You: Yes, I'll promise. I will try to keep that promise. Although, I might forget to do so in the rush of the things I have to do next week. After all, I am not perfect, you know. Remembering to do things is not one of my better attributes. (MAS, EA)

Mother: All right, dear. Remember now, you promised.

You: Yes, I did. I'll try very hard to remember to call you more often at other times too, to let you know how we are getting along. (AWC, MAS)

Mother: Goodbye. I expect to hear from you next week.

You: Goodbye, mother.

You will note that all of the six techniques were used at various times during the dialogue. You never lost your cool, there was no shouting or screaming. You spoke in a calm, reassuring, but assertive manner. At one point mother tried to use a favorite manipulation of hers – sobbing and sniffing over the phone – to make you feel extra guilty. Still, you handled it in an assertive yet affectionate style by using four of the six techniques we have described. Obviously, it is going to take considerable practice for you to become proficient with these methods. On the other hand, this will be the start of living a richer life, one in which you maintain your self-respect and dignity. This is particularly important in intimate relationships. In situational relationships (e.g., when strangers are involved, such as in a restaurant) it will protect you from being abused. Those will be the easiest for you to cope with. Notwithstanding, we want to point out that assertiveness becomes of even greater importance with your intimate relationships.

A few random remarks

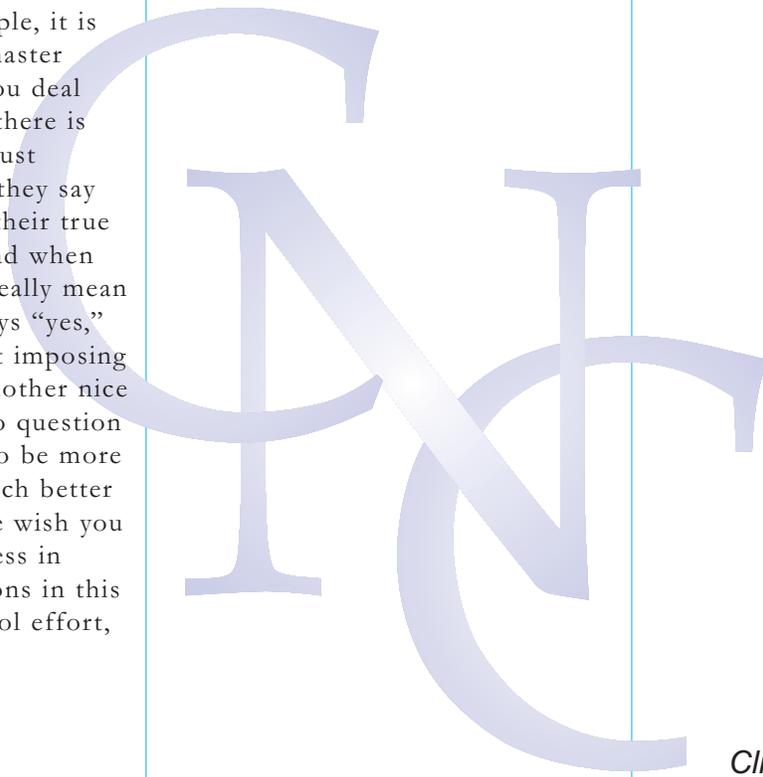
Although we have purposely limited ourselves to discussing assertive behavior as it applies to your weight control efforts, there is no question that it will rub off into other portions of your life. That's only for the better. It will make for a much happier lifestyle. At the same time, we are not presenting this as a panacea that will cure all your ills.

There will be times when you experience some adverse reactions. People may backbite, have temper tantrums, become very aggressive, and even seek revenge on you. However, that is their problem, not yours. On the other end of the scale, some individuals may become over-apologetic, confused and even develop various psychosomatic symptoms (e.g., feeling faint, headaches etc.). Sometimes, you can help these people by teaching them to become more assertive also. Several of the techniques we have described will, in fact, accomplish this. There may also be times when you choose not to assert yourself – that's your right too (nothing is all or none – Assertive Wisdom No. 8), but at least you will know how to assert yourself if you choose to do so. All we want to do in these pages is to teach you how, so you can assert yourself – if you want to.

Before concluding we must also mention some training techniques that will enable you to learn these skills. If you have a particularly difficult situation to confront, it is always best to rehearse the whole scene in your mind's eye several times before the actual occurrence of the encounter. This will tend to desensitize you to the anxiety that is produced by the circumstances. Additionally, you will have to learn relaxation techniques to help you cope with the tension produced as you learn to change your lifestyle to one of becoming an assertive individual when dealing with people who try to undermine your best intentions for controlling your weight problem.

And in conclusion...

When you assert yourself, you are not steam-rolling over another person (that's being aggressive). Part of being assertive is taking into account the other person's feelings – they have rights too – and you must respect them just as they are expected to respect your rights. The primary purpose of presenting you with these techniques is to enable you to reach a **Mutually Agreeable Solution**, based on the real issues of a conflict and not on a clash of personalities. Both parties must be able to maintain their feelings of self-worth. When you consider the consequences of these assertive interchanges between people, it is well worth the effort to master these techniques. When you deal with an assertive person, there is one more advantage we must mention. It is true, when they say “no” they are expressing their true feelings. On the other hand when they say “yes,” they also really mean it. When such a person says “yes,” you know that you are not imposing upon them – and that's another nice thing to know. There is no question that if everyone learned to be more assertive it would be a much better world for us to live in. We wish you the best of luck and success in carrying out the instructions in this text. In your weight control effort, you're number 1.



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