Assertive Refusal Skills

Being able to refuse requests from others is an important part of recovery. Sometimes you may run into old using friends who don’t know or don’t care that you are clean and may offer or push you to use. It may sound simple, but turning down an offer to use can be difficult; some people are very skilled and persuasive when offering drugs or alcohol! Practicing assertive refusal skills will help you be more successful at saying “no” and abstaining from use! Assertive refusal skills are skills that allow you to be effective at saying no to drug or alcohol offers.

The Assertive Refusal Skills are:

◊ **Respond Rapidly**: the faster you can say no to offers of drugs and alcohol, the less likely you are to give in. If you hesitate, it allows time to think of excuses to go along.

◊ **Respond with a clear and firm “no”** that does not leave the door open to future offers for alcohol or other drugs. Leave out any excuses or qualifiers – state “no” or “no, thank you” or “no, I don’t drink or drug.”

  o “No” can be followed by:
    ▪ Changing the subject
      • “No thanks, but tell more about what’s been going on in your life.”
      • “No thank you, I don’t drink – but can you tell me more about your specials on the dinner menu tonight.”
      • “No, I don’t use drugs – instead, can you tell me how the new job is going (or have you seen so and so lately?).”
    ▪ Suggesting alternative activities
      • “No thank you, but I would love a coffee/soda/tea/or something to eat.”
      • “No thanks, but would you like to head over to Starbucks for coffee.”
      • “No, I don’t drink, but I do know of a great pizza joint.”
    ▪ Clearly requesting that the individual not offer alcohol and other drugs again
      • “No thank you and I don’t want to be asked again.”
      • “No” (leave out the thank you if you have to repeat it a second time).
      • “No (one more time) and I need to leave now.”

◊ **Broken Record**: Continue to say no. You may feel uncomfortable at first, but reminding yourself that they are also trying to make you uncomfortable enough to drink or use, will be a helpful tool.
Assertive Refusal Skills

◊ Pay attention to **body language and non-verbal cues**.
  
  o Good eye contact – don’t take your eyes off of the other person’s eyes
  o Standing squarely towards the other person
  o Appear Confident
  o Use a calm even voice tone and volume
  o Keep your “body language” consistent with your statements
  o Maintain a posture and attitude of equality
  o Speak firmly, positively, & loud enough to be heard easily
  o Use clear, concise speech
  o Leave only after you have said no a second or third time

◊ If all else fails, **leave the situation**

Let’s examine some of these skills more closely! The first two skills (responding rapidly and with a clear, firm no) focus on leaving out excuses that leave the door open for using. Sometimes it can feel more comfortable to blame your refusal to use on an outside force. It may even be easier early in recovery to have external motivators (e.g., drug tests) influence you to abstain; however, this leaves future offers on the table. To decrease the likelihood of future offers, the assertive refusal skills will be more effective. To examine this more closely, fill out the following worksheet.
## Assertive Refusal Skills

### Making Excuses versus Assertively Refusing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excuse</th>
<th>Negative Consequence to the Excuse</th>
<th>Assertive Alternative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not today</td>
<td>They could ask me again tomorrow.</td>
<td>“No thank you. I am not using anymore.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maybe another time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maybe later</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't have any money on me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a drug test tomorrow</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am on Probation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fill in your own:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fill in your own:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fill in your own:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fill in your own:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fill in your own:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fill in your own:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assertive Refusal Skills

Have you ever made excuses when asked to use? What was the outcome?

___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________

Have you ever been able to assertively say no? If so, how did it feel? If not, how do you think it will feel?

___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________

Sometimes, people will continue to try to get you to use even after you’ve given an assertive no. The “broken record” means that you will continue to repeat your assertive refusal. If they continue to push you, it might be best to leave the situation if possible. In addition, it might be that your words are saying “no,” but your body language is giving another message. Consider the following: You ask someone for a ride to the store. He says no, but he is avoiding eye contact and is speaking in a low, soft voice. You notice he is fidgeting with his hands. Does it seem like you could push a little more and get him to take you to the store? You probably said “yes.” Even though he said no, his body language gave a different answer.

Why is it important to be aware of your own body language when saying “no”?

___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________

Remember a time when you were uncomfortable saying no. What was your body language like?

___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________

Remember a time when you felt confident saying no. What was your body language like?

___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
Assertive Refusal Skills

What will be the biggest challenge or barrier for you when trying assertive refusal skills? How will you overcome the challenge or barrier?

___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________

Can assertive refusal skills be used for situations other than refusing alcohol and drugs? What other situations could you use your assertive refusal skills?

___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________

What situations do you have coming up that you could practice your assertive refusal skills?

___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________

Practice your assertive refusal skills over the next week and let your counselor know how it went!