

Assertiveness

# Assertiveness

- Being assertive:
  - Asking for what you want
  - Saying “no” to what you do not want
  - Setting boundaries for ourselves
  - Using simple and direct language
  - Maintaining respect and consideration for ourselves and others
  - Involves taking responsibility for getting our own needs met
- Does NOT negate, attack, or manipulate anyone
- Does NOT involve apologizing for our needs

# Other Communication Styles

Submissive Aggressive Passive-Aggressive Manipulative

# Submissive Style

- Discounting or avoiding expressing one's own needs, opinions, or feelings.
- Pros:
  - Avoids immediate conflict
  - Helpful in situations with strong power imbalances
  - Helpful when stakes are very low (e.g., not fighting over how to clean dishes)
  - Encourages listening and the understanding of others
- Cons:
  - Unmet needs
  - Increased resentment and frustration towards others over time
  - Difficult to establish balanced and mutually respectful relationships over time

# Aggressive Style

- Using coercion, intimidation, and force to get what one needs.
- Pros:
  - Needs are often communicated clearly and directly
  - Can sometimes be helpful in high-stakes situations
  - Can sometimes lead to immediate results
- Cons:
  - Increased resentment, frustration and fear in others
  - Deterioration in relationships over time
  - Increased conflict and decreased cooperation over time

# Passive-Aggressive Style

- Expressing dissatisfaction, resentment, or anger indirectly or through passive resistance.
- Pros:
  - Avoids direct conflict
  - Can sometimes highlight problems – especially with sarcasm/silence
- Cons:
  - Unmet needs
  - Creates misunderstandings in others
  - Increased frustration for both people
  - Increased chance of conflict or relationship breakdown over time

# Manipulative Style

- Attempting to influence or control another person to get one's own needs met – often using nefarious means (e.g., guilt-tripping, gas-lighting, feigning helplessness).
- Pros
  - Needs often met in short-term without needing to take responsibility
- Cons
  - Can foster resentment in others once they see the manipulation
  - Can foster dependency in getting one's needs met
  - Undermines personal growth of learning to take care of one's own needs

# Assertiveness Training

- Nonverbal Assertive Behaviors
- Assertive Requests
- Assertive Responses and learning to say “No”
- Enforcing Boundaries
- PRACTICE!!!



# Nonverbal Assertive Behaviors

- Look directly at people when addressing them
- Maintain an open rather than closed posture.
- Do not back off or move away while communicating assertively.
- Be calm – use relaxation skills beforehand to put yourself in a grounded mental state.

# Assertive Requests

- Steps:
  - Use “I” statements.
  - Be direct and specific.
  - Express the reason for the request.
  - Do not apologize for your request.
  - Be open to compromise.
- Example: You had a stressful day at work and want some time to yourself from your partner for room mate to unwind.
  - “I would really appreciate some time to myself after work today. It was a stressful day, and I am feeling a bit irritable, so I think it would help me with unwinding.”

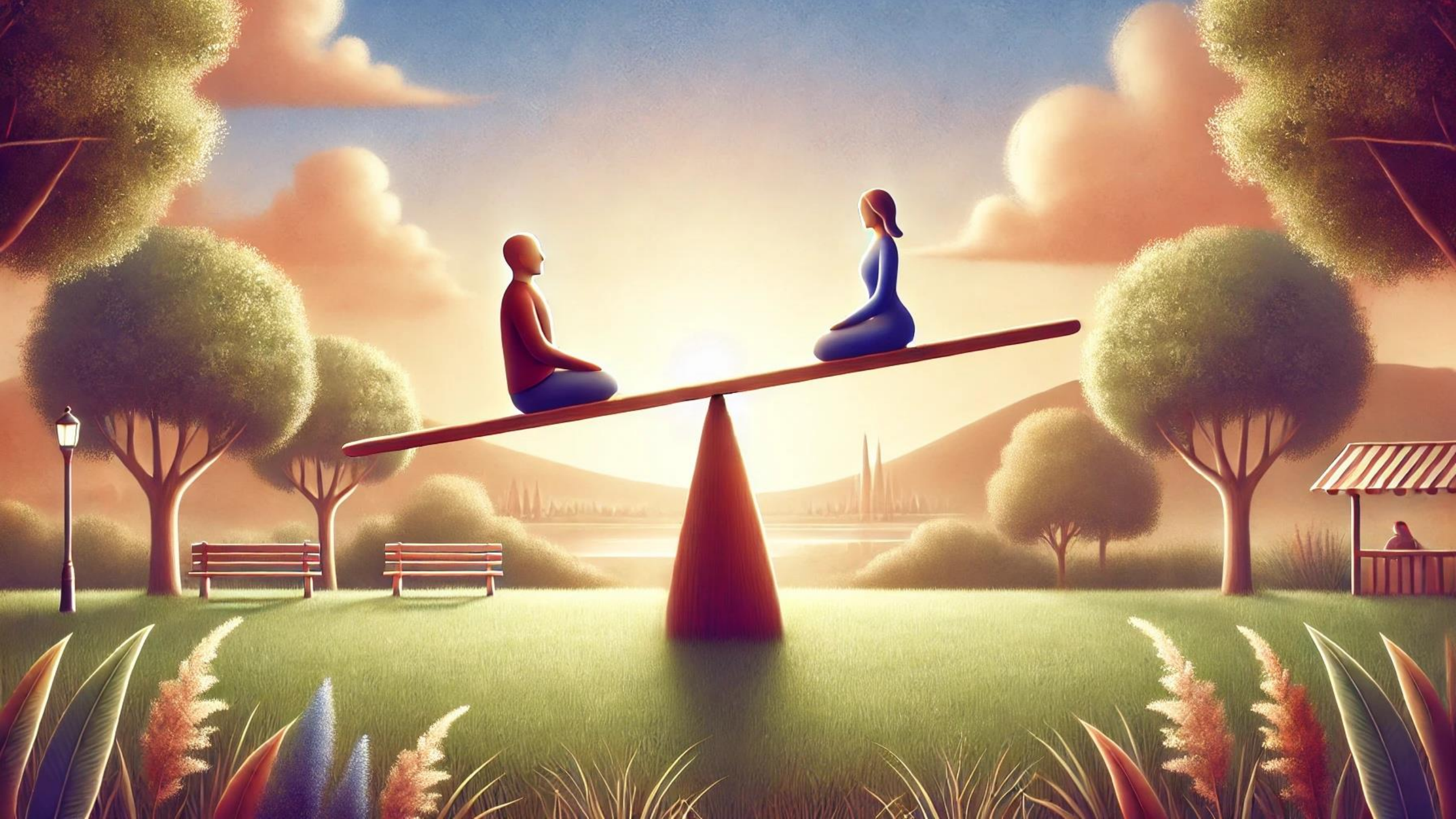
# Assertive Responses and saying “No”

- Steps
  - Acknowledge the other person’s request by repeating it.
  - Explain your reason for declining – focusing on “I” statements.
  - Say “No.”
  - If appropriate, suggest an alternative proposal.
- Example: Your parents want to visit you this weekend, but you are scheduled to work when they want to come.
  - “I understand that you guys want to visit this weekend. I’m scheduled to work out-of-town, so you won't be able to come. What about next weekend?”

# Boundaries and Assertiveness

- Boundaries establish clear expectations in how we want to be treated by others by protecting our:
  - Emotional Wellbeing, Mental Wellbeing, Physical Space, Physical Safety, Values, Beliefs, Time, Energy, Personal Life, Professional Life, Autonomy
- When both parties understand and respect each other's boundaries, trust develops, people feel valued, and open and honest communication can take place safely. This results in mutually beneficial and balanced relationships.
- Assertiveness helps us communicate our boundaries to others.





# Enforcing Boundaries

- Steps:
  - Know your boundaries – reflect on your needs!
  - Make and assertive request about your boundary.
  - Outline consequences if your boundary is crossed.
  - Be consistent with enforcing your boundary.
  - Escalate if your boundary continues to be violated.
- Expect Pushback
  - I can take time for people to adjust to your new boundaries - be kind but firm.
  - People may be upset – this does not mean your boundary is unfair.

# Enforcing Boundaries Example

“I would really appreciate if I could have some time to myself to finish up this report that is due tomorrow.”

## VOLATION OF BOUNDARY

“This report is important for me to finish on-time. If disruptions continue, I will need to lock the door.”

## ENFORCEMENT OF BOUNDARY

“I asked for some time to myself to finish the report, and I continue to be disturbed – so I will be locking my door now to get this report done.”

# Improving Our Assertiveness

- PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!!
- Identify areas in your life where you struggle to be assertive:
  - Making Requests
  - Responding to Requests and saying “No”
  - Enforcing Boundaries
- Write them out and practice roleplaying with someone that you trust.
- Start with lower-stake relationships (strangers, co-workers) and gradually increase to higher stake relationships (close family, friends, bosses).