

Training guidelines for how to be assertive and ask people not to smoke

Training guidelines and role plays (when smoking is permitted or is not permitted)

Written by Cecilia Farren GASP Consultancy Cecilia@gasp.org.uk
For Smokefree Action www.smokefreeaction.org.uk
Funded by Cancer Research UK
Adapted, with permission, from a guide produced by GASP of Colorado

INTRODUCTION

The rest of the UK is to follow the example set by Scotland and Ireland, by making all workplaces and enclosed public places smokefree by law. Staff and the public will need skills to politely but assertively ask smokers to extinguish cigarettes or move to an outdoor place where it is permissible to smoke. These skills will be needed in all workplace settings and enclosed public places covered by law. There will also be occasions, as happens at present that staff and public need to protect themselves and others from secondhand smoke in places where smoking is permitted or where smoke is blowing back into smokefree buildings from doorways and windows.

This assertiveness training guide is intended for anybody involved in implementing smokefree policies or smokefree workplace law. It provides ideas for training those whose job it will be to enforce or maintain a smokefree environment. It sets out how to speak to smokers whose secondhand smoke is unlawful and unwelcome.

The guide warns against being over or under assertive. It also gives examples of 'smoking' scenarios for use in training role plays. These can be used – together with examples from people's own experiences – to practise speaking up for smokefree air without putting down the smoker that they are not allowed to smoke.

Setting the scene

WHERE SMOKING IS NOT PERMITTED

The scene is a restaurant when the smokefree law has come into force. A family are taking their seats. At the next table are a couple who have finished their meal and the man is smoking a cigar. The mother of the family leans towards the smoker and says politely but not too apologetically, "Excuse me, sir. You may not be aware, but smoking is not permitted in enclosed places, including this restaurant. To enjoy your cigar, you can go into the garden where there is covered area for smokers. Thank you." The man says 'OK' and goes outside to smoke his cigar.

WHERE SMOKING IS PERMITTED

The scene is the same restaurant before the smokefree law comes into place. A family are taking their seats. At the next table are a couple who have finished dinner. The man is smoking a cigar. The mother of the family leans towards the smoker and says politely but not too apologetically, "Excuse me sir, we have a problem. For you to enjoy your evening, you want to smoke your cigar, but for our health and comfort we don't want to breathe in tobacco smoke." The man says 'OK' and puts out his cigar.

DISCUSSION

It seems simple. But a lot of people find speaking up to protect their health from secondhand smoke is not so easy. Two common mistakes are made.

- People can be 'under-assertive', and too tentative. They feel they don't have a right to interfere with what others choose to do.
- Other people can be 'over-assertive' and come on too strongly. They are too aggressive, rude or abrupt. Smokers get annoyed and refuse to cooperate.

When the smokefree law is in force it will be easier to ask smokers not to smoke or ask for help from a manager. However, staff and the public will still need the confidence and skills to speak up and remind smokers that they are not allowed to smoke.

There are different types of assertive behaviour

Before practising 'correctly assertive' behaviour it helps to recognise 'under-assertive' or 'over-assertive' approaches to dealing with secondhand smoke.

UNDER-ASSERTIVE

If you are under-assertive, you don't make eye contact, your posture is uncomfortable and nervous, you are apologetic as you speak in a low voice and hesitantly ask, "Excuse me, but would you mind terribly...?". Under-assertive behaviour often elicits over-assertive responses. The smoker may refuse the request and you feel bad because you were refused, then angry at yourself and the other person.

THE OVER-ASSERTIVE

If you are over-assertive, your back stiffens, and your eyes fix on the smoker and with a loud and demanding voice you say, "You shouldn't be smoking here. Put it out immediately. You should have more consideration for others." The smoker either apologises and puts out the cigarette or there may be an angry interchange which may even lead to physical violence. You feel righteous and superior. The smoker feels angry and vengeful.

Getting 'assertiveness' right

1. CORRECT TIMING

In a restaurant, public building or any enclosed workplace or public place, the situation is immediate and usually involves a stranger. Assertive behaviour often involves taking a risk, but not all risks are worth taking. The smoker may be anxious, irritable and upset, or may be an aggressive person who might get abusive. You might decide for your own safety that the cigarette smoke is the lesser risk. However, if the smoker is breaking the law or is in breach of a policy, it may be important to report the incident.

2. KEEP CALM

You need to relax. Take some deep breaths. Try to detach yourself from your own point of view.

Your statement of understanding opens up the communication. For example, you might begin by saying in a pleasant manner, "I understand your wish to smoke...", or "I'm sure you enjoy a smoke after a meal...". Then you state your dilemma.

3. COMMUNICATE YOUR SITUATION

Express your point. For example, "I'm sorry but this workplace has a smokefree policy" or "Unfortunately, tobacco smoke makes me very wheezy." This is important because the other person may not realise that there is a smokefree policy or that secondhand smoke affects others.

4. SUGGEST A SOLUTION

Involve the person in reaching a solution. For example, "I would appreciate it if you put the cigarette out. I can show you to the smoking area outside the building where you can smoke." Or "Would you mind not smoking here? You can smoke on the patio outside."

5. CONSIDER THE CONSEQUENCES

Think about what would happen if the situation is not resolved and state it politely.

"Thank you for your understanding. Otherwise, I will have to report it to the manager." Or "Thank you for being considerate. I will have to move elsewhere if not."

It is important to be calm and positive in your approach. You are not rejecting the smoker just the

smoke. When the smoker puts out the cigarette, thank him or her.

You have a right not to have your health damaged by secondhand smoke and you must respect the rights and needs of others.

ASSERTIVENESS HAS ITS REWARDS

Being assertive doesn't always succeed in all situations. Some people will not cooperate no matter how appropriate the approach. But in most cases they will. You will feel better for having asked. You won't have to feel guilty and negative for wishy-washy under-assertiveness or rude over-assertiveness. You will have acted in a positive and reasonable way.

Assertiveness role plays

Here are some scenarios where somebody is smoking and you need to ask them not to. For specific training groups or settings it might be better to ask the group or individual for relevant real life situations where people have been affected by secondhand smoke and did say something or would have liked to say something. One person should take the role of smoker and another plays the person asking the smoker not to smoke. Try them in situations where smoking is not allowed by policy or law and where smoking is permitted. If people work in groups of 3, one can be an observer.

FOOTBALL MATCH

You are at a football match – in a stadium with a roof. You are in a very confined space and the smoke from somebody's cigarette is blowing straight into your face. You decide to speak to the smoker.

OUTSIDE A HOSPITAL

Somebody is smoking outside a hospital which has a non-smoking policy including the grounds. You work for the health trust and you want to inform the person of the smokefree policy and get them to put the cigarette out.

PARENT AT THE NURSERY

You are a parent picking up your child at a nursery. It is raining outside and all the parents are packed into the hallway waiting for their children. Smoking is not allowed in the school but one mother lights up her cigarette near to the open door and starts to smoke. What can you say?

WITH A POTENTIAL BUSINESS CLIENT

You have gone for a meal with a potential client for your business. To your surprise the person you are doing business with takes about a cigarette and is about to light it. What can you say to them?

AT A FAMILY FUN DAY EVENT

You are with your children at a summer festival and you have taken them to the children's tent for an art workshop. One of the helpers and two of the parents are smoking even though the marquee should be smokefree. Nobody is enforcing the smokefree policy. What do you say to the smokers? What else can you do to protect you and the children?

TAXI DRIVER

You get in a taxi and the taxi driver is smoking. What can you say to him?

DOORWAY OF A PUB OR RESTAURANT

A smoker is standing at the open doorway of a smokefree pub or restaurant and smoke is blowing back into the dining area. How would you ask the person to move away or extinguish their cigarette?

Discussion

After the role play discuss the interactions.

- How did the 'smokers' feel?
- How did the person asking the smoker not to smoke feel?
- What wording worked best?
- What tone of voice was most effective?
- Was it easier when you could cite the law as the reason?
- Was anyone over-assertive or under-assertive?
- What could have improved the interaction?
- Should any types of body language be avoided?
- What additional strategies could you use to improve the situation so that everybody feels comfortable but that you succeed in getting the smoker to move or stub out their cigarette?
- What are the comments of the observers if groups used them?
- What general lessons can you learn from the exercise?