

# Lifestyle Coach Facilitation Guide: Post-Core

## Balance Your Thoughts for Long-Term Maintenance

### Content Overview

This session focuses on overcoming self-defeating thoughts and countering them with positive, realistic thoughts. One category of self-defeating thoughts that gets a lot of attention in this session is making excuses and rationalizations. This session also teaches assertive behavior - the honest, straightforward expression of thoughts and feelings. Assertive responses are distinguished from passive and aggressive responses.

### Lifestyle Coach Preparation Checklist

#### Materials

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- Post-core handouts:
  - What Are You Thinking?
  - Excuses and Rationalizations
  - Assertiveness
  - What is Assertive Behavior?
  - Tips for Assertive Behavior
  - Worksheet: Assertive Behavior
- "Food and Activity Trackers"
- "Lifestyle Coach's Log"
- Balance scale

### Key messages to reinforce

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- Countering self-defeating thoughts with positive self-statements is critical to the long-term maintenance of your healthy lifestyle goals.
- The more often you practice **not** giving in to excuses and rationalizations, the more able you will be to strengthen the behaviors of self-restraint and self-control and maintain your healthy lifestyle changes.
- By responding to challenging situations in an assertive way, we stand up for our personal rights in an appropriate way by expressing thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in direct and honest methods that do not violate the rights of others.

### After the session

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At the completion of this session, do the following:

- Use the “Notes and Homework Page” for notes and follow-up tasks.
- Distribute “Food and Activity Trackers” (4) for the following month.

## **Thinking About Our Behaviors**

**Present:** In order to be successful at long-term maintenance of weight loss, it is critical to learn how to effectively manage the way we think about our behaviors. Sometimes people can be their own worst enemies by allowing self-defeating thoughts to stand in the way of making lifestyle change permanent.

There are several common categories of self-defeating thoughts that can impact weight management. By identifying and understanding these types of thoughts, you can be more equipped to counter negative self-defeating thoughts with positive ones.

**Ask:** Can anyone give me an example of a self-defeating thought?



## What Are You Thinking?

**Ask:** Taking a look at common types of negative, self-defeating thoughts, are there any that you have found yourself thinking in the past? What are some ways to counter these self-defeating thoughts?

| Self-Defeating Thoughts:              |  | Try this <u>Helpful</u> Response Instead:  |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>All-or-nothing thinking</b>        | <i>Either I'm perfect on my diet and activity plan or I've completely failed.</i>                  | Making a mistake is definitely not the same as failure.  |
| <b>Jumping to conclusions</b>         | <i>I ate chocolate today, so reaching my healthy eating goals is impossible.</i>                   | I don't have to be perfect. I make healthy food choices most of the time.  |
| <b>Negative fortune-telling</b>       | <i>I won't be able to resist the desserts at the party.</i>  | No one will force me to eat. I need to prepare myself in advance.  |
| <b>Discounting the positive</b>       | <i>I only walked for 100 minutes this week. I deserve credit only if I reach my activity goal.</i> | I deserve credit for every positive action that I take.  |
| <b>Emotional way of thinking</b>      | <i>Since I feel so hopeless about reaching my goals, it really must be hopeless.</i>               | Everyone gets discouraged from time to time. My goals are unreachable <u>only</u> if I decide to give up.              |
| <b>Labeling</b>                       | <i>I'm a failure for overeating or skipping my workout today.</i>                                  | Of course I'm not a failure. I reach my goals most weeks.  |
| <b>Believing in food myths</b>        | <i>If I eat standing up, it doesn't count.</i>   | A calorie is a calorie, no matter how I consume it.  |
| <b>Excuses &amp; Rationalizations</b> | <i>It's okay to eat these sweet foods because I'm so stressed out.</i>                             | Emotional eating is a habit I need to break. I need to tolerate my stress or cope with my problems in a healthier way. |
| <b>Overstatement</b>                  | <i>I'm totally out of control with my eating and lack of activity!</i>                             | I may have strayed from my plan, but I can start following my program again right away.                                |



## Excuses and Rationalizations

**Present:** There is one type of self-defeating thought that deserves further attention and discussion: making excuses and rationalizations. Certainly, this type of behavior applies to many situations, not just weight loss: *I know this shirt is too expensive, but I'll splurge just this once;* or *I really don't have too much going on at work tomorrow, so I can stay up late and finish this movie even if it means I'll be tired in the morning.*

Making excuses and rationalizations for a slip from healthy eating or activity is a normal type of thought pattern for people engaged in behavior change. Sometimes thoughts such as *It'll go to waste* or *It's a special occasion* can give us permission to stray from our healthy lifestyle behaviors and long term goals. The more you give into these thoughts, the more likely you are to regain weight as well as establish a pattern of accepting excuses or rationalizations.

However, the more often you practice **not** giving in, the more likely you are to strengthen the behavior of self-restraint and self-control. It is important to emphasize that countering excuses and rationalizations requires repeated practice, just like other elements of behavior change.

**Ask:** Take a look at this list of typical statements and identify any that you have used yourself.

### It's okay to stray because.....

- It's just one little piece.
- It's not *that* fattening.
- It won't matter in the long run.
- It'll go to waste.
- I'll disappoint someone if I don't eat it.
- Everyone else is eating.
- I burned a lot of calories on my walk today.
- I'll be careful tomorrow.
- No one will see me eating it.
- It's free.
- It's a special occasion.
- I'm upset, and I just don't care.
- I'm craving it, and I'll probably just eat it eventually.
- I paid for it and I want to get my money's worth.
- I'll do physical activity tomorrow.
- I might not be able to eat this again for a while.



## Assertiveness

**Present:** As you continue changing your eating and physical activity habits, you may find yourself facing some situations involving other people who are not supportive of your healthy lifestyle.

Imagine that you have been invited to a dinner party by a friend. You call the host before accepting the invitation to tell her that you are enrolled in a lifestyle program to change your eating behavior.

Hi Carol, I would love to come to your dinner party, but wanted to let you know something ahead of time. I am currently in a lifestyle program that has helped me change the way I eat. I am not calling to ask you to serve anything special at the party, but just wanted to let you know that I will probably be taking smaller portions and having fewer drinks than I may have in the past. I wanted you to know ahead of time so that you would understand my reasons.

Now imagine that when you arrive at the party the host begins to pressure you to eat and drink by telling you to “eat hearty” and “one more drink won’t hurt you.”

There are several ways that you could respond to the host:

### Give in:

- *Okay, if you insist.*
- *I guess you’re right - one night won’t hurt me.*

### Talk back:

- *If I had known you were going to push food on me, I would have stayed home!*
- *What’s the matter with you? I told you I’m trying to eat less!*

### Be assertive:

- *No, thank you, I can’t, but I will certainly enjoy what I do eat.*
- *I would like nothing better than to eat all of this delicious-looking food, but this program is very important to me. So I’ll have to say no.*

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**Present:** Effectively managing situations such as these requires an important behavioral skill: **assertiveness**.



## What is Assertive Behavior?

**Present:** Assertive behavior refers to exchanges between people that involve honest and straight-forward expression of thoughts and feelings. In challenging situations, there are several ways that people often respond to others:

**1. Passive (non-assertive) response:** A passive response often means that we violate our own rights by not being honest with other people about our feelings. A passive response can give others an opportunity to take advantage of us.

➤ *I guess you're right - one night won't hurt me.*

**2. Aggressive (hostile) response:** An aggressive response means we are directly standing up for our personal rights, yet our conduct is inappropriate and violates the rights of others.

➤ *What's the matter with you? I told you I'm trying to eat less!*

**3. Assertive response:** By responding assertively, we stand up for our personal rights in an appropriate way by expressing thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in direct and honest methods that do not violate the rights of others.

➤ *I would like nothing better than to eat all of this delicious-looking food, but this program is very important to me. So I'll have to say no.*

### Why Don't People Assert Themselves?

**We don't want to be aggressive.** We have all been taught not to be aggressive, and people frequently confuse aggression with assertive behavior.

**We worry something negative will happen.** People often worry that others will become angry or dislike them if they are assertive. They feel that others may view them as "pushy" or "selfish."

**We don't want to be impolite.** People may mistake being passive with being helpful, kind, and "nice." For example, "I'll taste this dessert because I know you worked hard to make it."

**We never learned how to be assertive.** If you have never learned how to be assertive you may not have the skills, and it may feel unfamiliar or strange to respond to people in this manner.



## Tips for Assertive Behavior

Practice these tips for asserting yourself in challenging situations:

- **Use “I” statements to express your feelings and choices.** Use the words “I feel...” or “I would like to...” as opposed to “You should...” or “You shouldn’t...”
  - **Appropriate:** *“I would appreciate it if you didn’t tease me about my lifestyle changes. It makes me feel self-conscious.”*
  - **Inappropriate:** *“Stop acting like such a jerk. You could stand to lose some weight yourself.”*
  
- **Talk about the action or behavior and not the personality of the person to whom you are speaking.**
  - **Appropriate:** *“John, I would like you to help me with kitchen cleanup so that I can avoid the temptation to snack while putting away leftovers.”*
  - **Inappropriate:** *“John, if you weren’t so lazy and helped more around the house, I would have an easier time sticking to my lifestyle changes.”*
  
- **Consider your manner and tone of voice.** It is important to look at the person you are speaking to, and to speak in a pleasant - but firm - tone of voice.
  
- **Practice assertive behavior.** Assertive behavior skills can be learned, but like other skills, practice makes perfect!



## **Worksheet: Assertive Behaviors**

**Present:** Try to think of situations that have occurred since you started the National Diabetes Prevention Program *Lifestyle Intervention*. When have you struggled to assert yourself, and how might you respond in the future?

- 1. Describe one social situation that makes it hard for you to be assertive about your new eating behaviors:**

**What might be an assertive response in this situation?**

- 2. Describe one social situation that makes it hard for you to be assertive about your new physical activity behaviors:**

**What might be an assertive response in this situation?**

