



How to Handle Authority Figures

What is Authority?

Power invested in a job role or given to another person which enables them to exercise control over and individual(s).

Different types of authority

Positional

Here authority is invested in the job role, in a particular situation (project leader) for a particular amount of time or in technical expertise.

Interpersonal

Power passed from one individual to another based on mutual perceptions/expectations, e.g., seeing someone as charismatic, dominant, one-up, wise, controlling.

It is important to recognize that positional authority does not bestow on an individual an ability to be influential with others. Likewise someone with interpersonal skills does not always find themselves with direct authority over others e.g. the adviser.

Difficulties in handling authority figures

- bringing difficult authority relationships from the past into the present
- seeing in authority figures the personal qualities we are unwilling to see in ourselves e.g. judgmental, critical, caring
- using patterns of behaviors we learned in the past to deal with authority e.g. rebellion, compliance and passivity
- limiting our choices in dealing with authority by 'swallowing down' rules about how we should be with others e.g. be nice, don't trust others and don't upset others.



- using the authority figure as a way of putting ourselves down e.g. I wish I could be as powerful and influential as you.

Choices For Handling Authority Figures

See the following as a range of choices to be exercised selectively given the individual and circumstances concerned:

- say what you want
- say what you're feeling/thinking
- make demands
- be persistent
- be prepared to compromise
- pay attention to timing
- be sensitive to what the other person needs/wants
- take the initiative
- let go
- do nothing
- pay attention to falling into old patterns of behavior
- don't put yourself down
- exercise your own authority
- pay attention to who they are rather than who you imagine them to be
- test reality e.g. how do they exercise authority? (e.g. criticize/give advice/ impose conditions).



Assertiveness means:

Respecting myself, that is who I am and what I do and respecting other people

Taking responsibility for myself, that is how I feel and what I think and do. For example, “I feel angry when you put me down” is more assertive than “You make me feel angry when you put me down”.

Recognizing my own needs and wants as an individual person that is separate from what is expected of me in particular roles.

Making clear ‘I’ statements about how I feel and what I think. For example, ‘I feel very uncomfortable with this decision’. ‘I think that it is a good idea to draw up a plan of action’.

Allowing myself to make mistakes, that is recognizing that sometimes I will make a mistake and that it is ok to make mistakes.

Allowing myself to enjoy my successes, that is validating myself and what I have done and sharing it with others.

Changing my mind, if and when I choose to, having paid attention to reasons, evidence.

Asking for ‘thinking it over’ time. For example when people ask me to do something and I need time to consider whether or not to do it, ‘I would like to think it over and I will let you know my decision by the end of the week.

Asking for what I want, rather than hoping someone will notice what I want and moaning later that I didn’t get what I wanted. Asking for what I want does not always mean insisting on getting it.

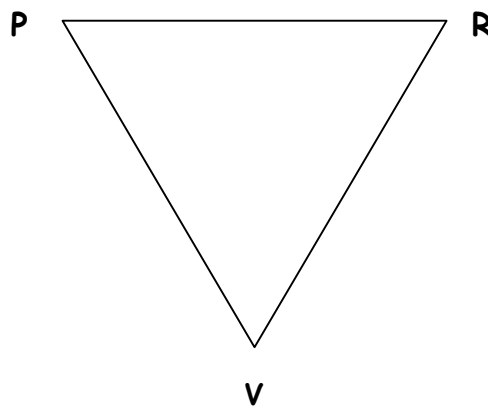
Setting clear boundaries. For example, ‘I know that you would like me to visit you, and thank you for inviting me. I am however unable to come this weekend and would like to visit you later in the year’.



Recognizing that I have a responsibility towards others, rather than being responsible for others. (As adults we have responsibility for and towards our children which is different from having responsibility towards each other as adults).

Respecting other people's right to be assertive too.

THE DRAMA TRIANGLE



It is possible to analyze many social situations (involving two or more people) in terms of the ***Drama Triangle***.

According to the Drama triangle, individuals can quickly fall into one of three roles (Persecutor, Rescuer, Victim). In the playing out of any one situation the individuals can quickly switch the roles between themselves.

A husband (Persecutor) is beating his wife (Victim) in the street. A stranger (Rescuer) intervenes and tries to help the wife. The wife switches her role, then comes to the aid of her husband (now victim) and they both persecute the stranger who then becomes the Victim.

Although the roles are quickly exchanged in a situation some individuals have a strong preference for one of the three roles.



Roles

Persecutor

(I am better than you; you are inferior). Because of this inequality I therefore have the right to persecute you. Will persecute openly (either physically or verbally) or can manipulate a third party to undertake this role (*'I wouldn't put up with him if I was you'*).

Rescuer

(I know more than you; you are inadequate). The Rescuer keeps offering help, even when it is not needed, and becomes upset when the help is rejected (*'I was only trying to help...'*).

Victim

(I am helpless; you are better than me). Typical Victim statements are: *'Why does this always happen to me?', 'I don't understand'; 'I can't cope'*. Scratch a Victim and a Persecutor is likely to appear.

How to avoid the drama triangle.

- Don't put yourself down (feelings of inadequacy, helplessness etc.)
- Don't put the other person down (by being judgmental, or feeling superior)
- Be factual - pay attention to your feelings, but state only the facts
- Be aware of the invitations offered by the other person to be a persecutor, a rescuer, a victim.
- Don't collect bad feelings and unfinished business.

