**Assertiveness and Confrontation**

In your positions as Resident Assistants, you'll be expected to confront certain students in various situations. These situations will most likely involve students who are involved with policy violations, but it could also involve students who are treating other students unfairly, or students who are making unreasonable demands on your time.

Confrontation is an inevitable part of your job. Confrontation is made easier if you learn how to confront in an assertive manner. Aggressive or non-assertive behavior will not get you the results you desire.

In a confrontation, it is important to realize that as someone who confronts inappropriate behavior, you will sometimes be met with acceptance. At other times you may be met with aggression or a lack of hearing. There is no specific formula for confrontation, as situations and personalities will all differ from incident to incident.

**Defining Behavior**

**Non-Assertive Behavior**

Non-Assertive behavior occurs when one individual does not stand up for their rights. A non-assertive person may have a tendency to say yes to situations, whether they agree with them or not. A non-assertive person's rights are negatively impacted, because they may not express honest feelings, thoughts, and beliefs. When a non-assertive person does express these things, they are often disregarded, because they may be spoken in a non-confident and apologetic manner. Individuals who are involved in non-assertive communication look to avoid conflict and appease others.

**Aggressive Behavior**

Aggressive behavior occurs when one individual's rights take precedence over the rights of another, and it may involve an attack on a person, verses their behavior. The goal of aggression is often domination. In aggression, one individual typically communicates in a way that disrespects and devalues another individual, along with their thoughts, ideas and opinions.

**Assertive Behavior**

Assertive behavior is behavior where one individual is able to communicate their needs, desires and expectations, while still respecting another individual's rights. Assertive individuals give and get respect from others that they interact with. Assertive communication is fair, and it allows for compromise when the needs of two individuals are in conflict. It communicates respect for another person, although not necessarily support for another person's behavior.

**Tone of Voice and Non-Verbal Communication**

Although we communicate with words, we often communicate more non-verbally than verbally. Voice tone and body language are very important factors to keep in mind in communication and confrontation, because you can say all the right things, but if you come off as meek or hostile, your words may not obtain the desired outcome.

**Non-Assertive Behavior**

Voice tone in non-assertive communication may be too quiet and without appropriate inflection. It may be monotone.

Eye contact may be indirect, where an individual does not look another individual in the eye. A non-assertive person may cross their arms uncomfortably and loosely, slump down, or wring their hands.
**Aggressive Behavior**

Voice tone in aggressive behavior is often loud, harsh, shrill or hostile.

Eye contact is often glaring, eyes may be piercing, lips may be pressed together, and fists may be clenched. Individuals involved in aggressive behavior may invade another person's personal space, with arms crossed tightly around the chest.

**Assertive Behavior**

Voice tone in assertive behavior is expressive, calm and clear.

Eye contact is direct, and an appropriate amount of personal space is maintained. Assertive behavior involves straight and relaxed posture that is not threatening.

**Tips for Successful Confrontation**

- Practice reflection when you communicate. This involves restating back to a person what they are saying, as it communicates to them that you are hearing and understanding what they are saying. When an aggressive person realizes that their points are being heard, they in many instances will calm down and become less aggressive.
- Do not ramble; make your point directly and concretely.
- Keep your voice tone neutral; do not be too hostile or too passive.
- Remain calm. Explain how you feel, why you feel the way you do, and what you will and will not do in managing a situation. Present options (i.e. you can do this and this may happen, but if you do this, this may happen).
- If you feel that an individual is trying to manipulate you and move the conversation away from the issue of the confrontation, try repeating your original point repeatedly, which will allow you to focus the discussion on the appropriate issue (i.e. the problem behavior).
- Never threaten an individual with a specific consequence. You can always state the possible consequences of behavior, but never threaten a specific end result, because if the end result does not happen, you will lose credibility. When discussing consequences, "may" is a much better word than "will".
- Never get emotionally involved in a confrontation...it will make you very ineffective.
- Do not swear or behave inappropriately, as it will allow the individual who you are confronting to focus in on your inappropriate behavior, instead of their own.

**Closing Thoughts**

Confrontation can be stressful and scary. Successful confrontation skills are learned, and they are made better with practice. Remember that due to situational and personality issues, being assertive will not always allow you to obtain your desired results. Most likely it will, and if it doesn't, you will at least leave the confrontation with your respect and dignity in place, with no focus on your behavior as a staff member in the halls.