

Ready, Set,

No!!!

A beginner's guide to saying **no and meaning it**

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Tired of agreeing to things you don't really want to do?

Frustrated that the people in your life won't take no for an answer?

Saying no can be a real challenge. But being able to set limits and say no is a necessary part of life! In this report, you will receive three valuable kinds of instruction:

Ready: you will learn why saying no is actually a great kindness and a public service. We will bust some common myths about saying no. You'll finish by taking a quiz to learn a bit more about why saying “no” is hard for you.

Set: you will receive two important tips about how you can prepare for these conversations. You'll learn how to pick your battles and figure out where your efforts will do the most good.

No!: you will get some do's and don'ts to make the actual process go a lot more smoothly. You will get support for the process

And, as a bonus, there's a reading list at the end of this report, if you'd like to read up more on the topic.

Let's get started!

Ready...

Lots of people feel really terrible when they say no, especially when they have to say it to people they love or respect. Many people think that saying no is a way of being rude, mean, or disagreeable. When they think of saying no, they think of something like this:



Photo credit: [aophotos](#) at Morguefile

Not very friendly-looking, is it?

Maybe you were raised to think, “Hey, if I *can* help out, I *should*. It's the nice thing to do!”

Nothing could be further from the truth. I'm not trying to wage a war on random acts of kindness or philanthropy. Not at all! Those kinds of giving-- the kind that is spontaneous and entirely up to you-- that is giving that feels *good*.

The stuff I want to help you with is the sort of “kindness” or agreement that comes out of a heavy, unpleasant feeling of obligation, guilt, or shame. I'm talking about when you **know** that you don't want to do something, so you spend a long time trying to compose a simple “no” in your head, only to say “yes” when the time comes to stand your ground.

Over time, that sort of agreeableness and “kindness” can wear on you, causing big resentment, anger and eventually, burnout. So, what if saying no could look different? What if it could be gentle **and** firm?



Photo credit: [GaborfromHungary](#) at Morguefile

Doesn't that look better?

Healthy boundaries are important. They are not brittle or wishy-washy. They are firm *and* flexible.

I want you to know that setting healthy boundaries is very possible, even if you've struggled with it for years. And in fact, it's easier than you think.

See, once you understand that saying no is actually a healthy and loving act-- not something rude, mean, or spiteful-- it becomes a little bit easier to do.

So, let's talk about the kindness of no.

Saying No is Kind

I don't know if you knew this, but saying no and setting limits is a very kind thing to do. Why? Try these on for size:

People don't have to try and read your mind or anticipate your needs.

Saying no lets people know where you stand.

If you can say no, you can say yes to what you actually do want.

Setting limits builds your trustworthiness; people won't trust your word if you can't say no.

Saying no gives other people permission to set limits.

People will respect you and your time.

Healthy boundaries let you take better care of yourself and others.

You will have more time for the things that matter in life.

If you can say no, you will feel more empowered and less resentful.

Having healthy boundaries will protect your physical and emotional well being.

Have I convinced you yet? When you think about it, saying no really is a public service. It is a kindness to yourself and to others.

If that's true, why is it so hard to do?

Well, maybe we worry what others will think. Or, we don't want to be rude, or hurt someone's feelings, or be selfish. These are just a few of the most common myths that exist in our culture about saying no.

See how many of these common myths you buy into...

The Myths of No

Do any of these sound familiar?

If I say no, I'm being rude. *Not at all!* You aren't being rude if you say no, even if you say it several times. The person who persists in asking after you've made your position clear is being rude, not you.

There isn't a nice way to say no. *It is very possible to set loving limits.* We can be very nice and compassionate when we have the breathing room that saying no can give us.

People will hurt/leave me if I am not agreeable/accommodating. *What kind of people are you hanging out with, anyway?* It is unlikely that your boss will fire you for saying no. (And if I'm wrong about that, do you really want to be in that threatening of a work environment?)

If I set limits, I am hurting/disappointing/upsetting other people. *People are stronger than you think-- they can tolerate and accept being told no.* Even people directly under your care, such as young children or aging parents, need you to set healthy and appropriate limits with them.

If I say no, people won't like me. *If people like you just because you're agreeable, then they don't really like you to begin with.* Do you really want to barter your own choice to secure someone's high opinion of you? You can have people in your life who like you for **you**, not what you do for them.

Saying no is selfish. *What is wrong with putting yourself first?* Aren't you entitled to some of your own time and energy? If you don't say no often, your resources will quickly get consumed by other people.

If I don't help others when asked, I'm not a good person. *You can't help everyone all the time.* It is fine to make philanthropy a part of your life, but if you're doing it for the wrong reasons, it is no longer philanthropy but something more like a compulsion.

No wonder we have such a hard time with this stuff.

Your “No Phobia”

Saying no is hard for lots of people. It's so common that I gave it a name: **no phobia**. Interestingly, many different things cause no phobia.

Check each item that is true for you.

- 1.) I worry about what others will think if I say no.
- 2.) I don't like it when people disagree or argue.
- 3.) I have a hard time coming up with the right words to say no.
- 4.) I want people to like me.
- 5.) When there is conflict, I freeze.
- 6.) When someone asks me for help on the spot, I almost always agree without thinking it through.
- 7.) I get tongue-tied when I need to speak up for myself.
- 8.) I truly enjoy looking after and caring for others.
- 9.) Conflict or even playful arguments make me uncomfortable.
- 10.) I am more comfortable caring for others than being cared for.
- 11.) I'm afraid others will withdraw their support or love if I say no.
- 12.) I am very good at peace-keeping and smoothing over conflicts.
- 13.) I'm certain when I don't want to do something, I just don't know how to say it.
- 14.) I don't want to be mean.
- 15.) People often compliment me on how helpful I am; helping makes me feel good.
- 16.) I go along with things I don't like just to keep the peace.
- 17.) I was taught to put other people's needs before my own.
- 18.) When people ask me to help with something I'm good at, I have a hard time saying no.
- 19.) I dread the disapproval of others.
- 20.) I don't know how to say no firmly and nicely

Tally up the items in each group. Which one do you rank highest on?

Items 1, 4, 11, 14, 19 are about people-pleasing

Items 3, 6, 7, 13, 20 are about being tongue-tied

Items 2, 5, 9, 12, 16 are about avoiding conflict

Items 8, 10, 15, 17, 18 are about caregiving

The people-pleaser

You are intensely focused on pleasing other people. To you, the worst thing in the world is someone disapproving of you or feeling disappointed by your choices. You struggle with self-doubt. It is very important to you that you are liked and get along well with everyone.

The tongue-tied

You are clear on your boundaries, but you have a hard time putting them into place. When people ask you to do things, you feel rushed or agree out of politeness, and then kick yourself for it later. You just wish you had a nice way to say no. You know your own mind, you just have a hard time speaking up for yourself.

The conflict-avoidant

You really dislike conflict. Arguments and fights leave you feeling uncomfortable, out-of-sorts, even chaotic inside. So, you've gotten very good at smoothing things over. When conflict can't be avoided, you cave quickly. You'll do almost anything to keep the peace, and you probably were a peace-keeper growing up in your family.

The caregiver

You truly enjoy taking care of other people. You are tuned in to the needs and feelings of others, and you were probably raised to put the needs of others before your own. But, you may sometimes get confused about where to draw the line in meeting other people's needs. You may also find that you neglect your own needs and boundaries in a desire to help others.

These are not discrete groups. In fact, they tend to go together. So, for example, it would make sense that someone raised to be a “nice girl” or people-pleaser would tend towards caregiving, as that is a traditionally feminine role that she was probably encouraged to embrace.

Are you surprised by what you learned?

Or did this confirm what you already knew?

So, you now know why it can actually be a great kindness to say no and

set limits with others.

You've learned about some of the most common myths associated with saying no.

And, you've learned a bit more about yourself and where some of your own “no phobia” may be coming from.

Even with all this back story, saying no will still be hard. So, let's prepare for those challenging conversations with some practical guidance and tips.

Set...

So, how can we better prepare for these conversations? There are two simple points to consider.

1.) Pick your battles

2.) Start small

Picking your battles. When we first learn about a new skill, it's natural that we might try to apply it everywhere, or to feel overwhelmed about where to start. Your first job is to identify those situations where it would be most beneficial to start saying no more often.

Are requests for favors eating up all of your free time?

Is your workload getting intolerable because your boss can't take no for an answer?

If it helps, make a list.

What is really getting under your skin? Take a moment to think it over.

Start small. Maybe you came up with a long list. There may have been some pretty big items on there, too. There probably was some stuff that you thought to yourself, "I am not looking forward to that conversation at all."

That's fine. It's ok to start small. In fact, it's preferable. Beginning with the small stuff will give you a chance to practice, to see all the benefits that "no" can offer you, plus it will build your confidence.

So, give yourself permission to start small. It is very important.

No!!

So, you have your list. You've picked a few things you'd like to try. How do you get started?

Things to try...

Watch for opportunities. Now that you've picked your battles, you know what to look for. Seek out opportunities for practice.

Eye on the prize. Keep the happy outcome in mind: more free time, a raise, less time wasted on stuff you don't like, whatever you like.

Keep it short. The word no is spelled with two letters. Take that as an example and keep your refusals short and sweet.

Match inside and out. Try and let your inner resolve shape your body posture and language and vice versa. If someone senses your doubt or hesitation, they're more likely to push back.

Repeat, repeat, repeat. Get comfortable repeating yourself. You may need to restate your no *many* times before it sinks in.

Combine a yes and a no. If you must, you can combine a yes with a no. Stand your ground on the point that matters, but concede on something else that you don't mind helping with. Use this sparingly.

Buy time. Maybe you were caught off guard or forgot what you were going to say, and you're feeling pressed for answers. Buy time, tell them you need to think it over first. Follow up quickly with your no when ready.

Wrapping up. Don't be afraid to walk away if the conversation stalls or the person isn't getting it. No's should be short and sweet, and if you've

gotten into a lengthy discussion, it's probably best to wrap it up quickly.

...And here's a look at habits that make the whole thing harder. It's natural to do some of this stuff by accident at the beginning... but it will get easier with practice.

Things to avoid...

Over-explaining. You don't need to launch into a long, involved explanation about your reasons for saying no. That just begs for people to argue with your reasons.

Apologizing. This suggests that you've done something wrong and you haven't. Sometimes the words are out of your mouth before you even realize, so just do your best to catch yourself before it happens.

Saying yes. Ok, maybe this one is too obvious. But, sometimes we will agree to something off the cuff just to close the conversation. If you intend to say yes, great. But saying no after saying yes is much more difficult to do, so avoid it if you can.

Worrying. Whether it's worrying what others think, or if they're mad, or what the outcome might be, work instead with what you know. You've said no... now what? Have some lunch. Work on a project. Enjoy that free time. *If* someone is upset with you, make it their job to approach you.

Seeking approval. People may not always agree with your decision or your no's. They may feel disappointed or hurt. That's their stuff, not yours. Don't let it confuse you. You've thought this through and picked your battles, after all. You're doing this for a reason.

Guilt. It is not uncommon for people to feel guilty when saying no. If you need to, go back to the "Ready" portion of this report and read it over again for support.

Remember: You will probably fall into some of these stuck places on your journey. Don't be too hard on yourself about it. Just observe and let that experience inform your next choice.

Free Resources

Did you enjoy this report? This is just the tip of the iceberg! Try some of my blog posts for more tips and help on saying no.

Learning more about “no phobia” & people-pleasing...

[The people-pleaser's dilemma](#)

[What makes a people-pleaser](#)

What can happen when we don't say no...

[10 painful costs of people-pleasing](#)

[Don't be a crane wife](#)

[Invisible work](#)

Ways to find space for yourself in your own life...

[10 how-to's for healthy boundaries](#)

[Love your lunch, love yourself](#)

[The happiness right under your nose](#)

[The idle hour](#)



Thanks for reading!

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Bio



Hi! I'm Ann Stoneson, a counselor and LPC supervisor in private practice in Austin, Texas.

I began working with people-pleasers in my practice practice in 2011, but my first experience with this stuff comes directly from my own life.

My first few decades of life were spent running on empty, trying desperately to please important people in my world. I got very good at it.

But, it ultimately left me hollow, depleted, and convinced that people

loved me for what I could do for them, rather than who I am.

It took a lot of courage to break the cycle and give people a chance to show up and love *me* rather than my "selfless" acts. Therapy helped me a lot with that. It's my aim to offer the same guidance and support for others.

I have a genuine passion for working with anyone who feels they must be pleasing and self-sacrificing in order to "earn" love from others. I also love working with [new moms](#), as women are taught early to disappear their own needs in service to others—and new mothers are especially vulnerable to these pressures.

Recovery from people-pleasing is possible. It takes time, persistence, and guidance, but it can be done. You deserve access to your own time, energy and attention. You can cultivate relationships with people who appreciate you for who you are, not just what you can do for them.

Wherever you are in your process of healing and learning, I'm rooting for you!

Warm wishes,

-Ann