

Assertively Saying “No” Learning Experiences 25

[Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)

Grade Level Range: Middle School - Adult

To Teachers:

If you have not already done so, please review the Introduction to Teaching Healthy Relationships and Relationship Skills ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)) for suggestions on teaching social-emotional skills, processing learning experiences, applying skills in real-life situations, and assessing, evaluating, and grading SES Skills. If you have not taught students how to role-play, observe, coach, and give feedback, see the Role Playing, Coaching, Observing, & Giving Feedback Reading & Process ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)) for detailed information on how to set up and teach role-playing that uses students as coaches and observers (who provide feedback). In addition, see the Observing Giving Feedback Skill Card ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)).

The purpose of this learning experience is to provide opportunities for students to become skillful in assertively saying “no”. See the Assertively Saying “No” Reading ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)) for background information about “Assertively Saying “No” as well as the Assertively Saying “No” Skill Card ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)). It is suggested that students be skillful in the use of “I Statements” before using these learning experiences. See the “I Statements Learning Experiences ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)), the I Statements Reading ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)), and the I Statements Skill Card ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)).

Materials/Readings/Skill Cards Needed For This Learning Experience

1. Assertively Saying “No” Reading ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#))
2. Assertively Saying “No” Skill Card ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#))
3. Assertively Saying “No” Observation Form ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#))
4. Observing & Giving Feedback Skill Card ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#))
5. In addition, see How To Teach SES Skills in the [How To Teach Social-Emotional Skills Module](#)

Procedure/Directions For Teaching How To Assertively Say No

1. Ask your students to think about a time when they were asked or pressured by a peer to do something they didn't want to do, and they wanted to say "no," but they didn't say "no," and they did something they didn't want to do as a result.
2.
 - Why didn't you say "no?"
 - How did you feel after not saying "no" even though you wanted to say "no?"
 - How did you feel about yourself, the other person, and the relationship as a result?
 - What impact did not saying "no" have on you and the relationship?
 - Ask volunteers to share.
2. Brainstorm a list of all the reasons people might avoid saying "no" when asked or pressured by a peer to do something they don't want to do. See the examples below.
3. Brainstorm a list of all the potential problems with avoiding saying "no" when asked or pressured by a peer to do something they didn't want to do.

Why We Don't Say "No" When Being Asked or Pressured To Do Things We Don't Want To Do

- Fear of rejection
 - Fear of making the situation worse
 - There is a power difference.
 - Fear of finding things out about the relationship we don't want to know or acknowledge.
 - The belief that our feelings and needs aren't important or the other person's feeling and needs are more important than ours.
 - Fear that saying "no" will create a conflict or escalate an already existing conflict.
 - It's easier to go along with what they are asking.
 - Not knowing how to say "no". Not having the skill.
4. Ask students to think of a time when they were asked or pressured by a peer to do something they didn't want to do, and they wanted to say "no," and they did say "no."
 - What happened when you said no?
 - How did you feel?
 - How did you feel about yourself?
 - How did you feel about the other person and the relationship?
 - Ask if any volunteers are willing to share their answers to these questions.

5. Brainstorm a list of the possible risks and benefits of saying “no” when pressured to do something you don’t want to do, including how someone feels about themselves, the other person, and the relationship.
6. Distribute the Assertively Saying No Skill Card ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)) and, depending on their developmental level, an edited version of the Assertively Saying No Reading ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)). Discuss the importance of being able to say “no assertively”.
7. Discuss or have them brainstorm the differences between being assertive, passive, and aggressive.
8. Review and model the different ways to say “no” and the assertive, passive, and aggressive behaviors. See the Assertively Saying “No” Reading ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)).
9. Model the different ways to assertively say “no” and have students identify other ways people their age would say “no” for each category.

Procedure/Directions For Role Playing, Coaching, Observing, & Giving Feedback

1. Distribute copies of the Assertively Saying “No” Observation Form ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)) and the Observing & Giving Feedback Skill Card ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)).
2. Review these skills and demonstrate how to use them.
3. Explain that they will be role-playing, and they will have the opportunity to role-play and coach, observe, and give feedback on what they observe.
4. Review the process for completing the observation form and the process for giving feedback on the Observing & Giving Feedback Skill Card ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)). Demonstrate how to give feedback.
5. Divide the class into groups of 4. Select a role-playing situation to use with the whole class. In their groups, have them decide on an effective response. Ask several groups to volunteer to role-play the person being assertive with you. The group selects one person to role-play while the other group members sit next to the person being assertive to coach them. If and only if the assertive person gets stuck, another group member can offer suggestions. All role-playing students should use their copy of the Assertively Saying “No” Skill Card ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)) to help them successfully use the skill. When role-playing, it is important that you continue the pressure after their first response to provide them an opportunity to practice responding to continued pressure.
6. Have the rest of the class observe using the Assertively Saying “No” Observation Form ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)).

7. After each role-play, ask for a volunteer from the observers to provide feedback using the process outlined on the Observing & Giving Feedback Skill Card ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)), including asking the person being assertive what they did well and what they need to do better next time. Provide feedback to the observer regarding how well they provided feedback.
8. Have several groups repeat this process of role playing the person being assertive with you. At the same time, the rest of the class observes, and volunteer observers provide feedback after the role play. You provide feedback to each observer.

Role Playing The Skills In Small Groups

1. Provide them (one at a time) with the roleplaying situations below. Select those situations that are developmentally appropriate for your students. It is suggested that you also develop situations and ask students to generate their own.
2. Have each group agree on how they will respond to the situation. It may be helpful to have them write out their responses.
3. After they develop each response, they take turns role-playing in their groups. One person will be role-playing the person being assertive; a second person will be the recipient of the assertive response, the 3rd person will observe and complete the Observation Form ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)), and the 4th person will coach the person who is role-playing if and only if they get stuck. The coach's primary role is to note what worked well, what didn't, and what, if anything, they would have done differently.
4. It is important that the person on the receiving end of the assertive response continues their pressure, providing the person being assertive with an opportunity to practice responding to continued pressure.
5. Each group member will have the opportunity to play the role of the person being assertive, the person receiving the assertive response, and to be an observer and a coach.
6. All role-playing students should use their copy of the Assertively Saying "No" Skill Card ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)) to help them successfully use the skill.
7. The observer completes the Observation Form ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#))for the person being assertive.
8. After each role-play, the observer provides feedback using the process outlined on the Observing & Giving Feedback Skill Card ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)), including asking the person what they did well and what they need to do better next time.
9. The observer should also ask the person receiving the assertive response how likely they would be to stop pressuring the person based on their responses and why.
10. Next, they are to switch roles, with the assertive person now being the recipient of the assertive response, and the observer and coach switch roles.

11. After each role-play, repeat the process of the observer providing feedback and asking what they did well and what they need to do to improve. Then, ask the person receiving the assertive response how likely they would be to stop pressuring the person based on their responses and why.
12. While small groups are role-playing, you can circulate to gather information about students' competency. When walking around, you can intervene to improve effectiveness, correct misunderstandings and misconceptions about the use of the skill, and reinforce the appropriate and competent use of the skills. You will need to decide whether to intervene with a specific group or wait and process with the entire class. The information you gather will help you determine whether you need to reteach and role-play how to use the skill or whether a simple reminder will suffice.
13. After each group has completed all the role plays, bring the whole class back to process.

Questions include:

- What ways of assertively saying “no” did you use effectively, and which ones do you need to improve or do more consistently?
- Which ways of assertively saying “no” were easiest and why?
- What ways of assertively saying “no” were the most difficult and why?
- What ways of assertively saying “no” do you think will be easiest to use in real life and why?
- What ways of assertively saying “no” will you have the most difficulty with when you use them in real life and why?
- What was it like to give feedback?
- What was it like to receive feedback?
- Was it easier or more challenging to give feedback or receive it? Why?
- What would make it easier to receive feedback?
- What would make it easier to give feedback?

Role Play Situations

Put yourself in the following situations. Imagine how you or most people your age would feel if they were in these situations. Develop an appropriate and effective assertively saying “no” response for someone your age and write it as you would say it to the person if you didn’t want to do what they are asking.

1. You are sitting outside the mall, and a friend/acquaintance wants you to vape nicotine with them.

1A. After your initial refusal, the person says, “Oh, don’t be such a baby. Go ahead. It won’t hurt you.”

2. While shopping at the mall, two of your friends try to convince you to steal some sunglasses. They tell you how easy it is, that the store is busy, and no one is watching, and they will distract the person at the counter.

2A. After your initial response, they continue to try and convince you to do it with them. They tell you that there is no way you can get caught.

3. Before homeroom, a friend who sits next to you in class asks you to allow them to cheat off you on a test later that day.

3A. After the initial refusal, the friend begs you to allow them to cheat off you, telling you that their parents will ground them if they do poorly on this test.

4. Two kids in your physical education class suggest that the 3 of you give another kid in your class a hard time. You feel uncomfortable being asked to do this and feel sorry for them even though they aren't a friend.

4A. After your initial refusal, they continue to pressure you.

5. A friend wants you to go somewhere you know your parents would disapprove of, and if they found out, you would be in big trouble. Your friend suggests you lie to your parents about the destination.

5A. After your initial refusal, they continue to pressure you, telling you how fun it will be.

6. You are with a group of friends when two start talking behind another friend's back. You are surprised and disappointed that they would do this, so you tell them how you feel.

6A. After your initial response, the person initiating the conversation asks, "Why do you care?"

7. You are with a group of friends when two of them start gossiping about a friend of yours. You are surprised and disappointed that they would do this. You hope someone else will speak up and stop it, but no one does. You decide to "recruit" your best friend.

7A. Your friend agrees with you, but the others say it's no big deal, and they continue to gossip about the person.

8. You are with a group of friends when two start talking behind another friend's back. You feel surprised and disappointed that they would be doing this. You hope someone else will speak up and stop it, but no one will. You decide to "recruit" your best friend.

8A. After your initial response, your friend whom you tried to recruit says: "It's no big deal".

9. You are at a party, and someone offers you a drink. You don't want to drink.

9A. After your initial refusal, they say: "Come on. You will enjoy this. It will make you feel so good".

9B. After your second response, they say: "Why don't you want to drink?"

10. You are at a party where a lot of people are drinking. Your date, whom you really like, keeps pressuring you to drink. You don't want to drink.

10A. After your initial refusal, your date continues to pressure you and tells you it will help you relax and have a good time.

11. You are at a party, sitting and watching TV. There are a lot of people there. A joint is being passed around. The person next to you passes it to you. You don't want to smoke.

11A. After your initial refusal of the joint, the person on your other side who you passed it to says, what's the matter with you, everyone is doing it.

12. You are at a party with a group of friends, one of whom is your best friend. As the 5 of you leave the party, you see that your ride slurs their speech, and several of your other friends appear drunk. The driver says, "Let's go. You and your best friend have had a few drinks.

12A. After your initial response, the driver says they are okay and not to worry. They will drive slowly.

12B. After your second response, they all seem ready to all get in the car. You believe it is very dangerous.

13. You are a high school athlete and have been invited to a party you have been looking forward to. You find out that the parents are not going to be home and that alcohol and maybe marijuana are going to be available. Your coach has warned the team that anyone caught at a party where alcohol and/or drugs have been consumed could be suspended from the team even if they haven't been using. How do you respond to your friends when they pressure you to attend the party.

13A. After your initial response, your friends continue to pressure you, telling you what a great party it will be, that everyone will be there, and that you will miss out on a great time.

13B. After your second response, a friend says, "Don't worry; your coach will never find out".

Student-Identified Situations

It is important to ask your students about the types of pressure situations people their age experience to make the practice more relevant to them and to give them practice for real-life situations.

Follow-Up Learning Experience:

Depending on their developmental level, you may decide to use the Assertively Saying No To Sex Learning Experience [Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#).

Follow-Up Learning Experiences: Applying Assertively Saying No Skills In Real Life Situations

It is not enough to have students only use skills in class. They must be given opportunities to apply skills in real life outside of class. Using skills in real-life situations, processing the results, and modifying their response is necessary and must be continuous and ongoing.

1. Students develop a goal to be more assertive using the My Goals Log LE and the My Goals Log ([SES Projects Module](#)). Using the My Goals Log allows students to change their behavior and develop goals that do not require much analysis or the exploration of alternatives and choices. The My Goals Log can be used to have students develop goals and evaluate their success at the midpoint and again at the end of the project.
2. Have students develop and implement the Assertively Saying No Project ([SES Projects Module](#)). The purpose of this project is to facilitate the development of competency in Assertively Saying “No” in real-life situations. It is a more extensive project than the My Goals LE. It requires students to monitor their progress over time using self-monitoring charts and doing self-assessments of their effort, their progress, and/or the extent to which they completed the project. It is found in the [Social-Emotional Skills Projects Module](#).