

Assertively Saying No Reading 25

Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships

At some point in your life, you will probably be asked or pressured to do something you don't want to do, either because you believe it is too risky or dangerous, you think it is wrong or immoral, it will hurt someone else, it's illegal, unhealthy, or against your values, it may jeopardize your future, you need time to think about whether you want to do it, or because you don't want to do it. There will also be times when you change your mind, and you have the right to do so. You also have the right to change your mind, especially if a decision or something you are doing no longer feels right. Just because you have done something in the past doesn't mean you need to continue to do it. You have the right to stand up for yourself, not to be taken advantage of, to ask for what you want and need, and to express yourself openly and honestly in a respectful manner. This includes saying "no". It may also involve saying "no" to someone you are in a close relationship with and with whom you want to maintain a healthy relationship. In addition, just because you did something once or several times does not mean you need to continue doing it. You have the right to change your mind.

People sometimes allow themselves to be pressured into doing things they don't want to because they believe they must do it to maintain the relationship. They worry that the other person will not like them or will break up with them if they are in a romantic relationship. If the relationship is worth maintaining, the other person should respect our need not to do what they ask. People who care about us will accept that we don't want to do something that doesn't feel right. Think about how you would feel about yourself and the relationship if you did something you didn't want to do because someone pressured you to do it. When you say "no," you are demonstrating self-respect.

When you say "no" to something you don't want to do, you are not saying that you are right or correct or that the other person is wrong or bad; you are saying that you don't want to do what they are asking. When you say "no," the other person has a choice of how they want to respond. People who care about you will not pressure you to do something that is wrong for you. Even if the other person initially feels frustrated, angry, disappointed, or hurt that you are not doing what they are asking, they will probably get over it. And, they will probably have more respect for you, and you will have more respect for yourself for standing up for yourself. In addition, when we say "no," we are giving others permission to say "no," and we may be preventing them from doing something they haven't thought through, really don't want to do, or something that is not good for them.

It is important to avoid being aggressive when saying "no." Aggressive communication is characterized by nonverbal behaviors such as fist-clenching, scowling, crossing one's arms, and being sarcastic, condescending, blaming, using a raised voice or shouting, threatening, finger-pointing, or using put-downs. It is also important to avoid being passive. Passive communication is characterized by using a quiet, hesitant, or meek voice, averting your gaze or looking down, and/or communicating with hesitancy or self-dismissal in your voice. Assertively saying "no" is a way to clearly communicate that you don't want to do what is being suggested. Being assertive demonstrates self-respect and respect for the other person. Nonverbal assertive behaviors include using a firm voice with appropriate volume (neither too loud nor too soft), direct eye contact, and an open, relaxed, and cooperative tone and posture.

Since being assertive may require the use of "I Statements", it is suggested that you read the "I Statements" Reading ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)).

When Saying No Avoid Aggressive Behaviors:

1. Fist-Clenching
2. Scowling
3. Crossing one's arms
4. Raised voice
5. Shouting
6. Blaming
7. Threatening
8. Finger pointing
9. Put-downs
10. Sarcasm
11. Being condescending
12. Apologizing for saying no. It's your right.

When Saying No, Avoid Passive Behaviors:

1. A quiet, hesitant, or meek voice
2. Averting your gaze or looking down
3. Communicating with hesitancy or self-dismissal in your voice
4. Apologizing for saying "no" or changing your mind

When Saying No, Use Assertive Body Language. Use:

1. A firm voice with appropriate volume (neither too loud nor too soft)
2. Direct eye contact
3. An open, relaxed, and cooperative tone and posture

How To Say No

When you are pressured to do something you do not want to do, there are many ways to say "no" without damaging the relationship. Below are some examples.

General:

In many situations, all you need to say is "no" or "no thanks". Examples include:

1. "No"
2. "No thanks!"
3. "No, thank you!"
4. "No, but thanks for asking."

Delay the Decision:

If you don't want to do it but don't want to say "no" or are unsure, there are situations when you can delay the decision. For example, if you are in a social situation and say, "Not right now, maybe later," the person may forget to check back with you, and if they do, you can use any of the general responses above. Examples include:

1. "Not right now, maybe later."
2. "I don't want to decide right now!"
3. "I'm not sure. I need time to think about it".
4. "Do I have to decide right now?"

Use Your Personal Credit Card When the Person Continues to Pressure You and the Person is a Friend:

When you are in healthy relationships, you have built up "credits." If a friend or romantic interest continues to pressure you after you have said "no," you can use your "personal credit card." It is unlikely that someone who cares about you will say that you have to do something you don't want to do to stay in the relationship with you. Examples include:

1. "Do I have to (*do the behavior*) to be your friend (*boyfriend/girlfriend*)?"
2. "I like you and want to be your friend (*boyfriend/girlfriend*), but not if I have to do (*the behavior*)!"

Recruit an Ally if You are With at Least One Close Friend & Another Person Continues to Pressure You.

You may be in a group situation where you and your friends are pressured to do something you don't want to do. In these situations, you may hope that someone else will speak up and say it is not a good idea or that they don't want to do it. Unfortunately, even though some people in the group don't want to do it, no one may speak up because it is difficult to say "no." In situations where people in the group you are pretty sure don't want to do it, you can "recruit" them to say "no" with you, so you aren't the only one saying it. You can turn to one or more of them and say something like: "I don't want to do this. Do you?" Even if they say they want to do it, you can still say, "I don't." Examples of recruiting an ally by turning to a friend and saying:

1. "I don't want to do this. Do you?"
2. "You don't go along with what they're asking us to do, do you?"
3. "I don't think this is a good idea. Do you?"
4. "You understand why I don't want to do this, don't you?"

Making Your Parents the Bad Guy:

Depending on your age, there are situations where you can blame your parents for not doing something. Most parents will be glad to have you blame them if it gets you out of a difficult situation. Examples of making your parents the bad guys include:

1. “If I did this, my parents would... (*kill me, ground me for life, etc.*).”
2. “If my parents ever found out, they would never allow me to be your friend (*boyfriend/girlfriend*), and I don’t want that to happen!”
3. “I’m already in too much trouble. I cannot take the chance of getting caught!”
4. In response to “they will never find out,” you can say: “They always find out.”

If Someone Tells You That “Everyone is Doing It”:

Examples include:

1. “I don’t think everyone is doing it, but even if they are, I’m not.”
2. “What other people do is their business. I make my own decisions, and I’ve decided not to.”

If Someone Keeps Pressuring You After You Have Said No:

1. "I said no, and I mean it."
2. "I said no, and I mean it, and that's all there is to it."
3. "If I wanted to do it, I wouldn't say no."
4. "What part of 'no' do you not understand?"
5. "When you don't listen to what I've said, it makes me angry."
6. "I'm feeling frustrated because you are not listening to me."
7. "I'm feeling frustrated because I told you I don't want to do it, but you still keep trying to get me to do it."
8. "I am feeling pressured by you".
9. "I care about you, but when you keep pressuring me, it makes me feel that you don't care about my feelings."
10. "I care about you, but when you keep pressuring me to do something I don't want to do, it makes me feel that you don't care about me."
11. "I do care about you. I don't want to do what you are asking."
12. "You keep asking me to do something I don't want to, which makes me feel like you don't care about my feelings."
13. "I know I said... before, but I have changed my mind."
14. "I know we did... but now I don't feel comfortable doing... I have changed my mind".
15. "It is clear to me that you are not listening to what I am saying. I am done talking about this. I said no, and I mean it".
16. "I am done talking about this now. We can talk about this later."
17. "I am done talking about this. I have said no, and I am not changing my mind."
18. "I am done talking about this. I am leaving."

Things To Consider When Saying “No”

1. You do not need to give a reason or explain yourself. “No” is enough. If you feel the relationship deserves an explanation or think it will help the other person understand your position, you can explain. Keep any explanation short and to the point. For example, I don’t want to do it because... (it’s bad for my health, my parents will kill me if they find out, I’m not ready, I need time to think about it, I just don’t want to do it).
2. You do not have to respond to questions, arguments, or pressure—keep saying no.
3. If they keep pressuring you, repeat yourself. Be a broken record and continue to say “no.”
4. If you continue to be pressured, feel unsafe, or threatened, leave.

**How to Stop the Chain of Rumors, Gossip, Ostracism, and
Talking Behind Someone's Back:
You Can Stop the Drama**

If you are in a group and someone starts talking behind someone else's back, spreading a rumor, gossiping, or ostracizing someone, here is how you can stop it. First, become aware of how you are feeling. Use a complete "I Statement" to tell the person how you feel and how you would like the situation to be resolved. For example, if you feel disappointed that a friend would be spreading a rumor, gossiping, or talking behind someone's back, you could say:

"I'm disappointed that you would say this about... I would appreciate it if you would not talk about them behind her back. Are you willing to do that?"

If you feel uncomfortable listening to this and being a part of it, you could say:

"I feel uncomfortable talking about... in this way." "Let's not talk about them." Or, you could say:

"I feel uncomfortable talking about... when they are not here." "I'd appreciate it if we didn't talk about them behind their back."

If someone responds, why do you feel this way, you could say:

"I just do. That's the way I feel." Or, you could say:

"I feel uncomfortable because I wouldn't want someone gossiping about me."

If you don't want to speak out alone and a good friend is with you and you are pretty sure they would agree with you, you could "recruit" them by saying to them:

"I don't feel comfortable talking about...in this way, do you?" If they say no, I don't; that will probably be enough to end the conversation. If it isn't enough and the other people in the group continue, you can say to your friend:

"Let's get out of here; I don't want to be a part of this. See you guys later."

If someone is being ostracized, you could say:

"I feel uncomfortable excluding... How would you feel if someone did that to you?"

If you don't want to speak out alone about someone being ostracized and a good friend is with you, and you are pretty sure they would agree with you, you could "recruit" them by saying to them:

"I think...should be included, don't you!"