

Building Healthy Boundaries: 14 Different Ways to Say No

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Learning how to say No is incredibly important in our lives. Doing so helps us maintain healthy boundaries and relationships with others and ourselves and also allows us to be more thoughtful and committed to the things we say Yes to. In spite of understanding the benefits of being able to say No when needed, many people (myself included) continue to struggle with actually doing so.

Here are some suggestions to help you master the art of saying No that you can put into practice today (I've included an example with each one, but feel free to put them into your own words):

1. **'No' as a complete sentence:** "No, thank you" or "No, thank you. I won't be able to." (Say it, don't apologize, then shut up.)
2. **Vague but firm:** "Thank you for asking me, but that is not going to work for me."
3. **Referral/Delegation:** "I won't be able to, but why don't you ask Joe? I bet he'll be able to."
4. **Last Minute Boundary:** "I can't add anything onto my calendar this month, but the next time you're planning to go _____, let me know as soon as you can because I would love to go with you."
5. **It's Not Personal:** "Thank you for thinking of me, but I am not doing any interviews this quarter while I am focusing on starting my new project."
6. **Showing Gratitude:** "I'm so touched that you thought of me and I really appreciate your enthusiasm and support. I'm sorry I won't be able to help out at this time."
7. **It's Not Whether, But When:** "I would like to, but I am unavailable until August. Could you ask me again closer to that time?" or "None of those dates work for me, but I would love to see you. Send me some more dates."
8. **Gracious:** "I truly appreciate your asking, but my time is already committed."
9. **Word of Mouth Is the Best Recommendation:** "I won't be able to, but let me recommend someone to you who would be able to help you."
10. **Someone Else Asked First/Family:** "I already told my partner/therapist/coach/etc. that I would not be taking on more at this time. I am working to create a more balanced life." or "That is the day of my son's dance recital, and I never miss those."
11. **Know Thyself:** "No. But here is what I can do...." (Then limit the commitment to what works for you.)
12. **Time To Assess:** "Let me think about it and I will get back to you."
13. **Give Others a Chance:** "You know, I feel like the accounting department is always organizing the office fundraisers/parties. Let's ask the Marketing Department to help this year."
14. **The Pressure Valve:** Author Katrina Alcorn shares: "We need a 'safety word' for saying no — an easy way to tell people that we can't/won't do the thing they are requesting, but that it's not personal. One convenient thing about authoring a book called *Maxed Out* is that now I can say 'I'm maxed out' and people who are familiar with the book know I'm asking them to respect that I'm taking care of myself, and that I also respect their need to take care of themselves."

Remember, just because you are available to do something or can do something, does not mean that you ought to. When asked to do or commit to something, ask yourself, "Do I want to do this thing, or is it that I feel I 'should'? Will saying 'yes' bring me joy or meaning? Or will I feel dread or regret when this particular event or task rolls around?"

If you realize that you want (and need!) to say No, try experimenting with some of the suggestions above to see which one works best for you. Remember that certain ones work better with certain people and/or with particular circumstances.

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