

Assertiveness

"No" is such a simple word....

Only two letters. Yet saying "No" out loud is harder for most people than saying, "I'll be glad to..." (eleven letters) or "When do you need me to..." (seventeen letters)

Most of us said, "No!" quite well when we were two. After all, it's the two-year-old's job to say "No." The authority figures in our lives at the time, our parents, expect us to say "No." And it is because of "No" that the year is known as the Terrible Two's.

Many of us (doctors especially!) grow up to be people pleasers. The word "No" drops out of our vocabulary. We substitute lots of ways to be agreeable and keep the other person happy. Saying "No" to the authority figures is not expected. And underneath it all we believe that saying "No" can cost us a lot in our adult life.

The unassertive "No"

Is accompanied by weak excuses and rationalizations. If you lack confidence when you say "No" you may think that you need to support your "No" with lots of reasons to convince the other person that you mean it.

You might even make up an excuse to support your "No." This can backfire if the lie is exposed and again, you will sound ineffective because you need to have an excuse to support your stand.

The aggressive "No"

Is done with contempt. "Are you kidding? Me, feed your cat while you're out of town?"

Sometimes the aggressive "No" includes an attack on the person making the request. "You must be crazy. I couldn't take on a project that unimportant."

The assertive "No"

Is simple and direct. "No, I won't be able to help with that." If you would like to offer an explanation, make it short and simple. "No, I won't be able to help with that. I've already made a commitment for Friday afternoon."

Strategies to make the assertive "No" easier

1. When someone makes a request, it is always OK to ***ASK FOR TIME TO THINK IT OVER***. In thinking it over, remind yourself that the decision is entirely up to you.
2. Use your nonverbal assertiveness to underline the "No." Make sure that your voice is firm and direct. Look into the person's eyes as you say, "No." Shake your head "No," as you say, "No."
3. Remember that "No," is an honourable response. If you decide that "No," is the answer that you prefer to give, then it is authentic and honest for you to say, "No."
4. If you say, "Yes," when you want to say, "No," you will feel resentful throughout whatever you agreed to do. This costs you energy and discomfort and is not necessary if you just say, "No" when you need to.
5. If you are saying, "No," to someone whom you would help under different circumstances, use an empathic response to ease the rejection. For example, to your friend who needs you to keep her child while she goes to the doctor, you might say, "No, Susie, I can't keep Billie for you. I know it must be hard for you to find someone at that time of day, but I have already made lunch plans and I won't be able to help you."
6. Start your sentence with the word, "No." It's easier to keep the commitment to say, "No," if it's the first word out of your mouth.

Practising for the Saying No World Cup

Let's look at some daily ways you can practice saying, "No," so that it comes more naturally to you. Paulette Dale in her book, "Did You Say Something, Susan?" suggests some simple ways to practice saying, "No." Here are some of her suggestions:

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Say "No,"

to the clerk who wants to write your phone number down when you return something to the store;

to the telemarketer who disturbs your dinner;

to the perfume demonstrator at the department store;

to your friend's pets when they jump on you;

to the secretary who answers the phone and asks if you mind if she puts you on hold.

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Make it a project to say, "No," to something every day.

When you do, notice it and give your self credit for practising saying such an important two letter word.