

Effective Ways of Saying “No”

Session 8 Handout

1. Saying “no” to people with whom you have equal power (Type 1).

- *Goal:* To clearly communicate a boundary or your expectations about another's behavior or request.
 - *Format* when you **DO want to maintain a relationship**.
 1. Acknowledge the other person's request by repeating it.
 2. Without apologizing, give a brief explanation of your reason for declining.
 3. Then say “no,” or if appropriate, you can end by suggesting an alternative plan in which both your and the other person's needs will be met.
 4. Example to sibling: “I understand that you would like me to help you with your move. Unfortunately, I have already made plans for that day, so I won't be able to help. If it would be helpful to you, I could come over Saturday and help you pack instead.”
 5. Example to coworker: “I understand that you would like me to help you with completing this project. Unfortunately, I am already committed that day to completing another deadline, so I won't be able to help. If it would be helpful to you, I could work on it Tuesday for a couple of hours instead.”
 - *Format* when you do not want to maintain relationship but **have a very hard time saying “no”** or are uncertain what to say or do:
 1. Acknowledge the other person's request by repeating it.
 2. Give yourself some time before responding to a request (e.g., “I'll let you know tomorrow.”). You will still want to respond within a reasonable amount of time.
 - *Format* when you want to maintain relationship and **people do not respond positively to your assertiveness**.
 1. Acknowledge request.

2. Empathize with other person's disappointment.
3. For example, "I know it must be disappointing to you that I can't help you move, but unfortunately, I already have plans."

- **Format when you do NOT want to maintain relationship.**

1. Acknowledge the other person's request by repeating it.
2. Say "No, thank you" in a polite, firm tone.
3. If the other person persists, repeat yourself while looking the person directly in the eyes and raising the level of your voice slightly (broken record).

2. Saying "no" to people who have more power than you (Type 2 power balance).

The behaviors are the same as the above. However, in this situation, **it is important to identify context of your relationship**. Know the difference between work, home and family relationships. **With parents, friends and siblings**, our ultimate goal may be to maintain or strengthen the relationship, so that we might be more willing to compromise on our wishes. However, recognition of differing needs is important here, even though they may have more power. The most important aspect of this exchange is that you communicate what you want and prefer (that you do not want to do something), which may differ from what you actually do (but you might agree to do it).

At work, the person may have a right to ask you to do something that you do not wish to do. There are several things you can do to assess your situation.

Role-play or imagine being your boss. Prepare your reasons for not wanting to do task or doing it differently. Then imagine that you are the boss. How would your explanation or request sound? Is it reasonable and respectful?

Get more information from multiple perspectives: Ask for feedback about power dynamics where you work, make sure it is the kind of person to whom you can safely talk.

3. Saying "no" to people who have less power than you (Type 3).

Here again, the same behavioral routine is applicable.

However, because of the power disparity, it is important to emphasize steps 1 and 3. Specifically, emphatically acknowledge the other person's request by repeating it (step 1) and be sure to identify alternative or future options if they are available (step 3). In

addition, thank them for making the request and making an effort to communicate with you.

Example to child: *“I understand that you would like me to help you finish your puzzle. I can’t do that right now because I am making dinner. I will be happy to play with the puzzle after dinner. Thank you for asking. It looks like a really interesting puzzle and I look forward to playing later.”*

Example to staff employee: *“I understand that you would like a raise and I agree that you have been doing a good job to date. Unfortunately, I am not able to do that. I do appreciate your coming to talk to me about this. Perhaps the financial situation will improve in a while and your request might become a more realistic possibility.”*

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