



Healthy &
Resilient You



THE POWER OF NO

Boundary-setting for resilience
and healthier relationships



Boundaries, and the Art of the Polite Decline

Have you ever felt like someone's taken advantage of you? Felt obligated to take on more than you should, especially during busy times like holidays or near deadlines? Said "yes" to something you don't have time (or don't want) to do, then blown your lid when things got too stressful?

If you answered yes to any of these, it might be time to reexamine your boundaries.

Boundaries can help us better manage **how**, **when**, **where**, (and on whom and what) we spend our time and energy. Rather than being restrictive, the right boundaries can be expansive, helping us to derive much more meaning, productivity, and fulfillment from those things and people we do spend time on.

But, for many of us, the notion of politely declining is an unsettling one.



Boundaries
limits we set
for ourselves to
facilitate *reasonable,*
safe, and healthy
ways of interacting
with others.

Don't Be Afraid of the No

If you bristle at the idea of setting boundaries, don't worry—that's a natural response for many of us, for various reasons:

- **Saying no** is commonly and incorrectly associated with being selfish or callous.
- **Boundaries always trigger a responding emotion.** A yes will bring a smile from the person doing the asking, and a no will probably have the opposite effect. So, we might find ourselves saying yes when we shouldn't to make someone else happy or to avoid conflict in the moment.




- It's possible that we **never learned how to set boundaries** or say "no," especially to authority figures.


Although setting proper boundaries can feel stressful at first, over time and with practice it can help bolster our resilience, and promote wellbeing. It's not wrong to want to do things for others; but when we want to please too much, and at our own expense, good intentions can leave us feeling resentful and exhausted.


The antidote? **A thoughtful no.**


The Art of Setting Healthy Boundaries

If setting and respecting your own boundaries is new to you, trying it can feel a little unnatural at first. These tips can help you learn how and when to say no.

-  **Use your inner yes/no compass.** Before responding to a request, imagine a compass in your head that can point to either Yes or No. If you agree to this request, and your needle points to Yes, how does it make you feel? Anxious? If your needle points to No, how then? At ease? Take a moment to breathe mindfully, pause, and reflect before answering.
-  **Set your calendar in concrete.** When drawing up your calendar, go all in by mapping out not just your work responsibilities, but also time for personal things like chores, leisure activities, gym time, and dinners with the family. Having definitive plans can make it easier to say no without guilt when conflicting requests come in.
-  **Remember, discomfort is fleeting, but resentment can last forever.** When someone asks you for something you can't or don't want to do, take a deep breath and remember that the discomfort of a no will pass in a moment. Conversely, the repercussions and resentment of saying yes can affect your health, happiness, and wellbeing long into the future.

 **Be aware of harshness bias.** According to psychologists, we believe people judge us more negatively than they do in reality. This applies to boundaries too. People tend to respect us more rather than less when we set healthy limits.

 **Just for a minute, don't live in the moment.** You have a 6 a.m. work call tomorrow, and your friends just invited you for drinks tonight. Before you say yes to drinks, imagine what it will feel like the next morning after spending the night out. (Hint: probably not great.) You can decline the invitation by saying, "Thank you for asking, but I have an important early meeting tomorrow, and it will be better if I head straight home after work."

 **Rehearse your no mantra:** Research shows that if we consciously prepare ourselves to give a specific answer to new requests, we're more likely to honor and maintain healthy boundaries. Try practicing a polite no phrase in your head and out loud so that it's ready when you need it. Something like: "I wish I could help with that, but I can't in good conscience take on any more tasks this week."

Like many healthy habits, setting boundaries takes more effort at first but should get easier with practice. Invest time to build your boundary skills now, and you might be amazed at how much time, effort and resilience you'll gain in return.

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If you find your level of stress is impacting your well-being, you can contact us for additional help and support.

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