

Saying “No” to Others and Saying “Yes” to Yourself

The following are important points to acknowledge in order to better manage external demands that occasionally conflict with our own personal needs. This document aims to better equip you to communicate in a healthy way while respecting more deeply yourself and those who present their requests to you.

I. Belief: I don't have a right to say "no"! (i.e. the belief that saying "no" is... selfish!!)

To begin with, it's important to seriously ask yourself the following question: Do I have the right to refuse requests presented (sometimes imposed?) to me by others? If you answer “yes”, you may move on to the next point. If you answer “no”, try to explore what's stopping you from having the freedom to refuse an external request. Where does this ban come from? Who instilled this belief in you? Your parents? Yourself? What is the point of this belief in your life? Does it help you grow? Is it hurting you? Is it hurting others? If so, how? Are there other less suffering ways to thrive while respecting yourself and others? Let's look at some answers to these questions.

II. Reality: The person making the request actually expects a "yes" OR a "no" from you.

People who come to you do so with the belief that you may accept or refuse their request, otherwise they would simply give you an order and not ask you questions such as, "Could you help me paint my apartment on the weekend?", "I would need \$50.00: could you lend them to me?" versus "Give me \$50.00... now!"

III. Action: What is rejected is the request, *not* the person!

Is it the rejection of a person... or a simple request turned down? It may be difficult to forget that the person who comes to us with a request comes to us for help. On the other hand, it must be remembered that if one cannot help them (for whatever reason), they will find another way to support themselves... unless in exceptional circumstances, which is relatively rare, let's face it! Remember that it is their request that we are refusing and not the people themselves.

IV. Responsibility: I am responsible for (taking care of) me!

It is my right (and my obligation!) to take care of myself. As an independent adult, it is up to me and only me to take care of my own needs and fulfill them. If I don't take care of them, no one else will do it (or very rarely) and it's not up to anyone else to do it but ourselves. So if we apply this principle to others as well, it is up to them to meet their own needs and not up to us. If we met all the needs of others, what learning would they make of their own lives? ... and how exhausted (and resentful) we would be!

Example: If someone asked you to lend them \$100,000, would you lend it to them at all costs? No? Why not?! "Well, I don't have that type of money in my bank account!" So it would probably be simple enough for you in this case to refuse because "it is clear" that you cannot meet the external demand of the other, not having the funds in the bank. The same principle applies when you are asked for help. If you are too tired to offer your help to the person who is in need, it is up to you to inform them that it exceeds your capacity. The other can't guess that you're too tired or that you had other commitments for the day (for example, resting... whoa!). It's up to you to inform the other person and let them know that "you wish you could help them, but you can't." You can always offer another solution or simply rely on that person being mature enough to find another solution. After all, it's not like you're the only person on earth who can help them?! Do you get the message? Otherwise, carry on with the reading.

V. Result: I say "yes" to myself... and it feels great!

A very useful trick that will guide all our decisions regarding external requests is the concept of TED\$ where we must ask ourselves if we have the 1) Time, 2) Energy, 3) Desire or 4) money in the bank (\$) in order to meet the external need presented to us. If the answer to only one of the four elements is "no", we have every right to refuse the other's request. Period! And above all, no justification is required! My "government" simply does not have the capacity to fulfill that need, sorry! The truth of the matter is that when we say "no" to external requests (because they exceed our limits at that time), we say "yes" to ourselves! Hence the principle that we –and only we– are responsible to meet our own needs. It's not up to others to do so. Again, the opposite is true. We also have the freedom to negotiate the external request, which means set our own terms regarding the request as per our limits. For example: "I can lend you \$10, but not \$20."

VI. Action: How to say "no" to the other (and "yes" to oneself... therefore to the other!!)

One of the simplest and most respectful ways to present our "no" to the other is by using the "sandwich" approach, where you start by validating the other's demand and then positioning yourself by setting out your response to the other's demand; we end by validating the other's request one more time.

Example 1: "Thank you for thinking of me to go to the concert (validation);
Unfortunately, I can't go: I'm going to the movies with my daughter (positioning);
It's really nice to have thought to invite me (validation); we'll have to try some other time."

Example 2: "It's nice to have thought of me to help you with your move (validation);
I'm really sorry: I have an exam on Monday (positioning); however, I could help you for a couple of hours on Saturday morning between 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. if that helps? (negotiation);
I really wish I could help you more (validation)."

VII. Learning: Tolerating the negative (immature?) reaction of the other!

To achieve emotional autonomy, and grow relationally, it's necessary to be able to tolerate the negative reaction of the other (if this is the case). Remember that *the more immature the other person, the more negatively they will react to your "no"*, i.e. that they simply have not yet grasped the importance of taking care of oneself... and others. They have not yet made one of the necessary apprenticeships in life in order to become an Adult, i.e. to grieve. In other words, your "no" will present them with a unique opportunity to grow and flourish: it's up to them to take it or leave it! Please don't take away this opportunity from them! And enjoy the mutual growth!

VIII. Conclusion: When I (authentically) take care of myself, I take care of others!

In short, when we say "no" to external requests because they exceed our limits, we say "yes" to ourselves, to our own needs. We take care of ourselves in the present moment and in the near and distant future AND we take care of the person who makes the request by telling them that we cannot meet their request so they can seek help elsewhere to have their needs met. When we assert ourselves, it also avoids to harbour bitterness or resentment towards others.

In a nutshell

It's about saying "yes" to yourself
by saying "no" to external requests (i.e. setting your boundary)
when they exceed our limits!