

27 Rights for Healthier Relationships

Healthy relationships— ask not “am I right?” Ask instead “do I have the right?”

Need rights? Boundaries? Assertiveness? Negotiation skills? Many troubled relationships become stuck between communication styles that vary between passive/avoidant or domineering/aggressive. If conflict triggers you to either “shut-up or blow-up”, you may benefit from understanding how to respect your rights and the rights of others using these 27 rights in healthy relationships.

Your emotional intelligence improves when you align your thoughts and your actions with your values. This alignment helps you become a healthier relationship role model. As you consider these rights, first focus only on yourself. These are YOUR rights. Then take a moment to consider the rights of others. **Remember that EVERYONE has these rights, even those annoying people who you don’t like.**

1. *I have the right to make decisions based on my own values, standards and beliefs.
2. I have the right to be responsible for my decisions, my emotions and my behavior.
3. I have the right to experience the consequences of my choices.
4. I say YES when I mean YES and NO when I mean NO.
5. **I have the right to say NO without feeling guilty.
6. I have the right to trust myself enough to experience all my emotions.
7. I have the right to treat myself and others with dignity and respect.
8. *I have the right to protect myself by ending conversations when I feel violated, afraid, angry, unsafe or for any reason that I choose.
9. *I have the right not to take responsibility for another’s problems, actions or feelings.
10. *I have the right to learn from my mistakes and to allow others to learn from their mistakes.
11. *I have a right to accept myself and others as human without having to be perfect.
12. *I have the right to allow myself and others to grow and change without judgment, comparison or competition.
13. *I have the right to allow myself and others to live in the present moment without the past as a weapon or baggage.
14. *I have the right to take my time.

15. *I have the right to change my mind.
16. I have the right to feel happy, relaxed and safe.
17. In every moment, I am responsible for whether I choose love or I choose fear.
18. I have the right to detach or let go.
19. I have the right to be comfortable with my beauty.
20. I am responsible for the value that I place upon myself.
21. I can trust in myself and trust others who EARN my trust.
22. I am responsible for when I choose to feel wounded.
23. ***I have the right to take care of myself first. "Self-First" is not selfish.
24. I have the right to "be the change I seek."
25. I am responsible for the life I have chosen.
26. I have the right to forget all of these rights.
27. I can remember them anytime I wish.

Application: Yes these are yours and everyone's rights, but

"What if "they don't respect my rights?"

"What if I FEEL guilty?"

"What if they said I was selfish when I disagreed with them?"

Below are the explanations for the most frequently asked questions about these rights in relationships.

***Differentiate between your personal relationships and your professional, career and workplace relationships.** Red Numbers preceded with *(#1, and #8 through #15) may not apply while you are a member of the armed services, representing an organization or professional licensing standards, working on the clock, or salaried on company payroll. Within contractual agreements and labor law guidelines, your employer has the right to enforce job requirements: codes of conduct, performance standards, production quotas and company policies. Personal rights are also subject to societal norms and health and safety laws. **As we learned during the Covid-19 pandemic, individual rights are restricted if an individual's actions endanger the lives of others.**

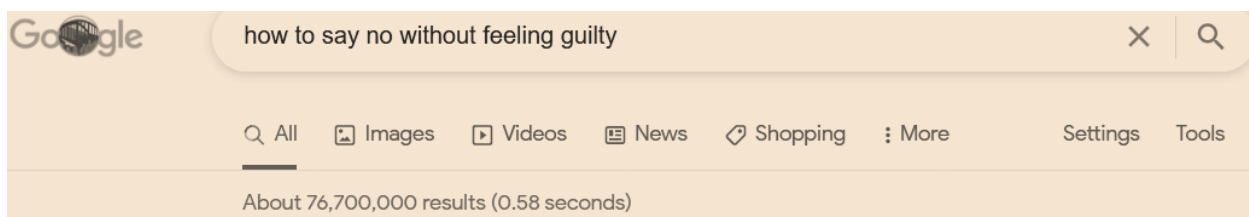
**** # 5. I have the right to say NO without feeling guilty.**

Saying no without feeling guilty is a confusing thought for people who tend to feel guilty about everything. Further insight may help clarify this point. Moral people feel guilt when their thoughts and actions are not aligned with their values. This type of guilt is *healthy guilt*. **Healthy**

guilt functions like the breaks and steering on a car. Healthy guilt helps us slow down and notice when we are about to make a wrong turn. Once identified, remorse and corrective action will transform healthy guilt into a learning opportunity.

What if, however, you say that you feel guilty when you did nothing wrong? If your actions were aligned with your values, if you treated others as you wish to be treated... then using the word guilt is not accurate. For example, *“I felt guilty when I asked him to wear a mask during the pandemic.”* You may feel uncomfortable, but did you do anything wrong or bad? Did you violate your values or standards? If not, then you might have a vocabulary issue, not a guilt problem. A larger emotional vocabulary helps replace the word “guilt”. Instead, ask yourself, “did I feel disappointed? Conflicted? Embarrassed? Sad? Vulnerable? Irritated? Worried? Fearful?” **Using the correct emotional label helps eliminate the unnecessary shame often attached to unhealthy guilt.** Notice each time you use the word “guilt”. Think deeper... were you bad or evil? If yes, then good for you. Insightful people use guilt as a guide toward corrective action. If you were not bad or evil, let yourself develop a more accurate emotional vocabulary. Correct emotional language helps you understand yourself better.

“I no longer feel guilty when I say no. Honesty is nothing to feel guilty about. I respect myself and maintain my dignity when I am honest. I can practice tactful ways to disagree or say no. I can even Google “how to say no” if I need help!.



***** # 23. I have the right to take care of myself first. “Self-First” is not selfish.**

If you feel selfish taking care of yourself, do you also struggle with unhealthy guilt? Many people were raised to believe that attending to their own needs is selfish. This message may be the result of surviving a dysfunctional childhood, or a trauma event. The message could stem from a religious or cultural history of suffering, oppression, or martyrdom. **The intention of “self-first” in the context of healthy relationships, is to function like an independent adult.** An airplane analogy is usually helpful to understand why self-first is not selfish. In the event of an emergency, airline passengers are instructed to secure their own oxygen mask first, before assisting a child or the person acting like a child. Using this analogy, failure to take care of your own needs first, may result in your becoming dead weight in the aisle, blocking the exit for everyone.

Taking care of yourself gives you the mental, physical and emotional ability to align your actions with your values. What advice would you give your beloveds? Take responsibility for meeting your own needs, then enter the world and be the best version of you, serving as a role model, fulfilling your purpose of service to others.

Assertive thoughts were inspired and adapted with permission by Charles Whitfield M.D. The Personal Bill of Rights in Healing the Child Within (1987).