



LIVING SKILLS

Personal Growth

REFUSAL SKILLS

PARTICIPANT WORKBOOK



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AN OVERVIEW OF REFUSAL SKILLS

The ability to establish strong boundaries and protect them—to say no and mean it—is essential in developing a healthy life. Like any other acquired skill, refusal skills become better with practice.

THIS WORKBOOK IS DIVIDED INTO FOUR SESSIONS

SESSION 1 introduces the concept that saying no assertively and respectfully is an essential skill in taking care of oneself and maintaining healthy relationships.

SESSION 2 focuses on the concept of boundaries and assertiveness in maintaining boundaries.

SESSION 3 teaches a specific refusal skills process.

SESSION 4 looks at how refusal skills help people maintain healthy relationships.



SESSION 1.

Introduction to Refusal Skills

We get asked to do things all the time. Sometimes we want to. Sometimes we don't. But even when the answer is no, we sometimes say yes.

Perhaps you are being offered a drink and you've been sober for a month. You tell your friend no, but he says "C'mon. I'm not asking you to get drunk. Just one quick drink and we'll go on our way."

Perhaps your neighbor frequently asks you to watch her three-year-old "for just a minute while I run out for an errand," and it usually turns out to be a couple of hours. You want to say no, but it feels impolite.

Perhaps a friend wants you to go to the movies. You're simply tired and don't want to go, but you're afraid her feelings will be hurt.

■ List some examples of times when you have said yes even though you really wanted to say no.

Why Being Able to Say No Is Important

Saying yes when we mean no can get us into trouble. The consequences may be significant. But even when the consequences are small, they have a harmful effect on our self-esteem and our sense of control.

Look at the following stories. In each of them, the person says yes when he or she means no. Write down what the consequences might have been for each of them.

Scenario 1.



Nathan had just gotten out of jail and was on probation for selling drugs. He was out celebrating with friends, and one of them pulled out some cocaine. Nathan didn't want his friends to think he wasn't going to party with them anymore. However, he also knew he could be called any time for a urinalysis (UA), and he didn't want to end up back in jail.

List possible negative consequences.

Scenario 2.

Mai was a housecleaner. Her boss called her Wednesday evening and asked her to come into work on Thursday—her day off. Mai had plans to see her granddaughter in a school play, but she also didn't want her boss questioning her loyalty. Did she dare say no? She gave up her day with her granddaughter and went to work.



List possible negative consequences.

Scenario 3.



Jim's father is an alcoholic. He has just gotten out of treatment for the sixth time. He asks Jim for \$1,000 so he can put a deposit on an apartment and buy some groceries. He's borrowed \$5,000 from Jim over the past two years and never paid him back. Jim and his wife are trying to save for a down payment for a house. They have a baby due in three months and live in a one-bedroom apartment. Jim feels desperate, but he can't bring himself to say no to his dad. What if his refusal to lend his dad money causes his dad to start using again? He gave his dad \$800 and asked him to please not tell his wife.

List possible negative consequences.

Scenario 4.

Patrick called up Maria and asked her to go to a ball game with him. She likes Patrick; in fact, she likes him a lot and has always felt attracted to him. The problem is that Patrick's divorce became final only yesterday, and the person he divorced is Maria's best friend. She knows it would be devastating to her girlfriend if she goes to the ball game with her girlfriend's ex, but Patrick says he's really lonely and needs company. He makes it sound as if he just needs company, but he's also telling Maria that he's always thought she was a beautiful woman. Maria reasons that she can see him just as a friend and he'll keep his hands to himself, so she says yes.



List possible negative consequences.



Why Can It Be So Hard to Say No?

Even though it may seem obvious that people should say no in certain situations, they may have a very hard time doing so. There can be a lot of reasons for this. They may be afraid of hurting someone's feelings. They may be afraid someone's not going to like them, or they'll be left out of the group. Or they may really want to do it even when they know they shouldn't.

Review the examples on pages 4–7 and write down why you think it was hard for each person to say no.

■ *Scenario 1. Nathan*

■ *Scenario 2. Mai*

■ **Scenario 3. Jim**

■ **Scenario 4. Maria**

Your Personal Goal

This program is designed to teach people how to say no when they want to, how to be clear about it, how to feel confident, and how to make it stick. Answering the following questions will help you identify when and why it's difficult for you to say no.

■ When is it hard for you to say no?

■ Who pressures you the most?

■ Who is it hard to say no to? (This may include more than one person.)

■ What situations are hard to say no to?

■ What is one goal you would like to reach by learning about refusal skills?
Write it here.

SUMMARY

- Saying no assertively and respectfully is an essential skill in taking care of oneself and maintaining healthy relationships.
- There are negative consequences of saying yes when you want to say no.
- It is important to practice the skill of saying no.

CHALLENGE

Identify one person you feel safe with and identify one situation in which you know that person will accept your no. Practice saying no respectfully with this person.

ANSWER KEY

(pages 4–7)

Why Being Able to Say No Is Important

In each of the scenarios on pages 4–7, the person says yes when he or she means no. Here are some possible consequences that each person might have experienced:

Scenario 1

- Nathan gets a surprise UA test and tests positive.
- Nathan's positive UA results in his breaking conditions of his probation.
- Nathan is sent back to jail for violating his probation.

Scenario 2

- Mai's granddaughter and daughter are disappointed at Mai for making work a priority over them.
- Mai becomes exhausted because of not having downtime.
- Mai becomes resentful of her boss, even though she could've said no.

Scenario 3

- Jim's wife finds out about him giving money to his father and becomes angry with Jim.
- Jim's wife no longer trusts him to prioritize her and their baby over his father.
- Jim cannot afford a down payment for his house.
- Jim's dad chooses to buy alcohol.

Scenario 4

- Patrick and Maria end up getting physical.
- Maria's girlfriend finds out about the date and gets mad at Maria for not telling her.

ANSWER KEY

(pages 8–9)

Why Can It Be So Hard to Say No?

You were asked to review the scenarios and write down why you think it was hard for each person to say no. Here are some possible answers:

Scenario 1. Nathan

- He doesn't want to disappoint his friends.
- He is so happy to be around his friends and not in jail anymore.

Scenario 2. Mai

- Mai doesn't want to disappoint her boss.
- Mai wants to make sure she has a job.

Scenario 3. Jim

- Jim is not used to telling his father no.
- Jim feels responsible for his dad since he is his son.
- Jim feels bad for his dad and wants to help him.

Scenario 4. Maria

- Maria is very attracted to Patrick.
- Maria wants to help Patrick.



SESSION 2.

Boundaries and Assertiveness

Boundaries look very clear on a map. Neat lines show where one country stops and another one begins. The idea of personal boundaries is basically the same. It is where one person stops and another begins. Boundaries define limits—what is okay with you and what is not. However, it can be much harder to see personal boundaries than the boundaries between countries on a map.

When we are not clear about our own boundaries, it means we get confused about what we want and need and what someone else wants and needs. It means we take responsibility for other people's feelings. Or we may expect other people to be responsible for our feelings.

Here are some examples of confused boundaries.

Uncle Jack walks into your living room, grabs your face, and gives you a big kiss on your lips. You did not offer the kiss and you did not want the kiss. Uncle Jack crossed the boundary between you and him, but you weren't sure it was okay to say no. You were not clear about the boundary between you and him.



Your coworker Jenika asks you to lunch, but you are very busy and say no. Jenika's feelings are hurt. She tells you that you are selfish and you feel guilty. The boundary between her and you is confused. You are not responsible for Jenika's feelings. The hurt she feels belongs to her. You didn't cause it.





What Are Your Boundaries?

Write inside the circle what is okay with you. Some examples might be:

- Hugs with family and friends
- Handshakes with people you are just meeting
- Sadness when someone you love moves far away

Write outside the circle the things that you want outside of you or that belong outside of you. Some examples might be:

- Hugs with strangers
- Your coworker's feelings
- Your mother's feelings

Why Boundaries Are Important

The purpose of boundaries is not to punish other people but to protect ourselves. It makes it very hard to say no when you are not sure you have a right to say no, or to stand up for yourself when you're not sure you have a right to think a certain way. If you believed Jenika's feelings were more important than your needs and feelings, it would be hard to stand up for yourself. You can only take care of yourself when you know what you want and what your values are, and that you have a right to your own wishes and feelings.

■ Can you think of a time when you did not protect your boundaries? Perhaps you let someone hurt you and you didn't say anything. Write your experience here.

■ Can you think of other times you did not protect your boundaries?

■ Can you think of a time when you did protect your boundaries? Perhaps it was a time when you stood up for your right to choose your own religion, apartment, clothes, or friends. Or you stood up for your right to be spoken to respectfully. Or something else entirely. Write your experience here.

■ Can you think of other times you protected your boundaries?

How to Protect Your Boundaries

You can protect your boundaries by being assertive. This is not to be confused with aggressive or passive. Here is the difference between passive, aggressive, and assertive.

PASSIVE: This is when you keep your feelings to yourself and don't say anything, even when you are upset by something somebody did to you. You don't let the other person know what your feelings are and pretend that nothing is wrong. You might even hide your feelings from yourself. You allow your boundaries to be violated.

AGGRESSIVE: This is when you express your feelings directly but negatively, such as through insults, put-downs, sarcasm, or even violence. It violates other people's boundaries.

ASSERTIVE: This is when you express your feelings directly, honestly, and respectfully to another person. It lets you stand up for yourself without violating the rights of someone else. You don't violate your boundaries or the boundaries of the other person.

■ After each of the scenarios on the following pages, write what should be said if the person is respecting his or her boundaries and those of the other person by being assertive.

Scenario 1.

Gale borrowed money from Russell. Russell had lent Gale \$300 last month, and Gale had promised to pay him back when he got paid. But Russell hadn't seen a penny of it. Now Gale was asking him for \$300 more. With tears in his eyes, Gale was saying he couldn't afford to buy food. If Gale didn't have the money back to him within a week, Russell would not be able to pay his own rent or buy his own food.



How can Russell say no to Gale in a way that would be assertive?

Scenario 2.



Mandy had been diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Her life had been a mess, but she got treatment, was taking her medication, and was living a stable life. She spoke at a community forum when she was running for a position on the community center board. An audience member yelled, “Sit down Mandy. We don’t want you on any board. You’re a psycho.”

What could Mandy say to the audience member that would be assertive?

Scenario 3.

Vang and Milt took their morning coffee break together almost every day. In early June, Vang was recognized at work for his great sales record. Milt congratulated him and appeared to be very happy for him. The next day Vang stuck his head in Milt's office and asked, "Coffee break?" Milt said he was busy. Every day for the next week Milt had an excuse not to go for coffee. Then Vang heard a rumor that Milt said he should have gotten credit for some of Vang's sales.



What could Vang say to Milt that would be assertive?

SUMMARY

- Assertiveness is important to maintaining personal boundaries.
- There are differences between passive, aggressive, and assertive ways to maintain boundaries.

CHALLENGE

Choose a situation in which you have had trouble setting boundaries in the past. Practice setting boundaries assertively in this situation now.



SESSION 3.

Refusal Skills Process

Valerie had been separated from her husband for almost a year, but they were still in the process of getting their divorce. She had primary custody of their three-year-old daughter, Maya. Valerie had been dating Stephan for about a month. She had a lot of fun with him and really enjoyed having him around. And he was nice to her daughter.

Stephan had come over to her house for dinner, and after she tucked her daughter in bed, Stephan stretched out his hand to her. She walked over to him and raised her eyebrows as if to ask what he wanted. He nodded his head toward her bedroom. She shook her head no. Stephan said, “C’mon Valerie. Maya’s asleep.”

Valerie asked Stephan, “What exactly is it that you are asking me to do?”

Stephan said, “You know. I’m crazy about you. I want to make love to you.”

Valerie said, “No, Stephan. I’m not ready for that yet. I’m not even divorced yet.”

Stephan kissed her neck.

Valerie pulled away. “Listen to me,” she said. “I’m not ready to get into a serious relationship. What if it doesn’t last? It could be very confusing for Maya. Let’s watch that movie we’ve been wanting to see. I’ll make some popcorn.”

Stephan argued with her. “Let’s just lie down together then. Maya never has to know anything about it.”

“I like you a lot, Stephan. I want to keep seeing you. But I’m just not ready yet.” Then Valerie turned and walked toward the kitchen.



While it can be challenging to learn how to say no, there are some specific actions you can take that will make it easier. As you read the list below, see if you can identify how Valerie used each one.

Ask questions. Be sure you know what someone wants you to do.

Name the trouble. Tell the person that this is something you do not want to do and why.

Name the consequences. Name what could happen if you went against your better judgment.

Suggest realistic alternatives. Suggest something safe and fun to do instead.

Say no firmly and respectfully.

Repeat the refusal if the other person continues to ask you.

Use body language that says no. A serious look on your face, gestures that emphasize your point, and the way you sit or stand all reinforce the no you say with your voice.

Build the relationship (if appropriate). Give an answer that tells the other person you want to maintain the relationship and that refusing the request is not rejecting the person. Do this only if it is a person who will not undermine the healthy choices you are making.

At the end of this session you will find a sheet that lists the steps in the Refusal Skills Process. Cut it out and post it in your bedroom or on your mirror, carry it in your purse or wallet, or put it anywhere that it might be helpful to you.

Refusal Skills Tips



Avoid pressure whenever possible.



You may have to repeat yourself.



Think about the words you will use to say no.



Practice the words ahead of time.



Plan alternative strategies.

Tips for Putting No into Action

Think of some situations that happen to you regularly when you need or want to say no.

1. Start with a situation in which it's pretty easy to say no or when the consequences are not very bad if you don't say no. Imagine how you could say no.

■ Write out how you would handle the situation using the Refusal Skills Process and the above tips.

2. Now think of a more difficult situation. Imagine how you could say no.

■ Would you use all the steps? If not, which steps would be essential in this situation? Write out how you would handle the situation using the Refusal Skills Process and the above tips.

3. Now think of a very difficult situation. Imagine how you could say no.

■ Would you use all the steps? If not, which steps would be essential in this situation? Write out how you would handle the situation using the Refusal Skills Process and the above tips.

SUMMARY

There are eight steps in the refusal skills process: ask questions, name the trouble, name the consequences, suggest realistic alternatives, say no, repeat the refusal, use body language, and build the relationship.

CHALLENGE

Now that you have practiced using refusal skills, try refusing a person whose response you are unsure of. Prepare in advance as to how you will respond if that person continues to push. Be sure to choose a safe situation.



A REFUSAL SKILLS PROCESS

Below are some basic steps to take when faced with a situation when you need to say no and the other person continues to pressure you to say yes.

Ask questions. Be sure you know what someone wants you to do.

Name the trouble.
Tell the person that this is something you do not want to do and why.

Name the consequences.
Name what could happen if you went against your better judgment.

Suggest realistic alternatives. Suggest something safe and fun to do instead.

Say no firmly and respectfully.

Repeat the refusal if the other person continues to ask you.

Use body language that says no. A serious look on your face, gestures that emphasize your point, and the way you sit or stand all reinforce the no you say with your voice.

Build the relationship (if appropriate).
Give an answer that tells the other person you want to maintain the relationship and that refusing the request is not rejecting the person. Do this only if it is a person who will not undermine the healthy choices you are making.



SESSION 4.

After You Say No

When you start practicing refusal skills, you may get a lot of pushback. People who are not used to hearing no from you may put you under a lot of pressure. They may continue to insist that you say yes. Here are some tips for maintaining your no when you feel pressured to say yes.

- 1** Stay calm.

- 2** Say the person's name and make eye contact.

- 3** Say, "Listen to me."

- 4** Pause to see if the person is listening.

- 5** Say no again in a direct, assertive way.

- 6** If the person is still pressuring you, say again, "Listen to me."

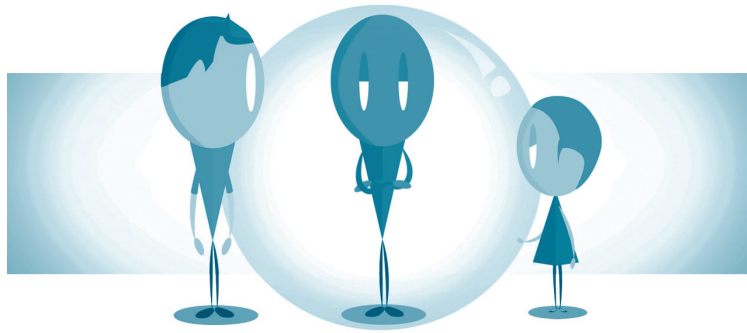
- 7** If the person does not listen after two or three times, leave.

Why It Can Be Hard to Say No

Sometimes people are surprised how hard it is to say no. For instance, Carla had sex with Jim even though she didn't want to because she was afraid he would break up with her if she didn't. Demetri worked overtime and missed his daughter's birthday party because he was afraid his boss would think less of him if he didn't work overtime that day. Chris was asked to join a group of buddies in skipping out of work in the afternoon when their boss was gone. He had a pit in his stomach, but he joined them anyway. On some level he felt it was wrong, but he didn't say no because he wasn't sure what he wanted to do. Here are some of the many reasons why people find it difficult to say no.

- Fear of losing a friendship
- Fear of displeasing a boss
- Feeling like you don't have the right to want or think something different from somebody else
- Not really being sure what you want
- Fear of hurting someone's feelings
- Never having learned about personal boundaries

■ Write out some of the reasons you say yes when you really want to say no.



What Happens After You Say No

Sometimes people experience the loss of a friend or close relationship when they say no. When this happens, people often feel sad, but it may be the best thing in the long run. Maintaining an unhealthy friendship or close relationship undermines your health. And sometimes saying no actually makes a relationship better. We strengthen old friendships and build new friendships based on the values we come to appreciate as we get stronger and healthier. People who have these values can sense it in others. They can also sense when they're being taken advantage of. If you are honest and trustworthy in thought, intention, and action, you will find yourself surrounded by people with the same values.

Katya had two friends she spent a lot of time with. They loved going to the casino together. But over a period of time, Katya lost a lot of money and she discovered she was having trouble. She knew it was time to stop playing the slots, but she kept going anyway. She finally decided she shouldn't go to the casino anymore. When her friends, Carol and Ia, invited her to the casino, Katya said, "I don't want to go anymore. I have lost too much money. I need to stay away."

Carol got angry with her, called Katya a chicken, and said she'd just go with Ia then. Ia was upset, too, but when Katya explained her reasons and suggested they do something else together, Ia agreed. In fact, she said, "I'm kind of tired of losing money too. Thanks for bringing this up."

This is an example of when saying no actually improved one friendship. It also lost Katya a friend. But her values and Carol's values had grown apart, and their friendship fell apart.

■ Are there people in your life who you think will respect your no? Write their names here.

■ Are there people whose friendship you are ready to let go of if they don't respect your no? Write their names here.

■ Where can you find new friends who will respect your no?

Changing a Yes That Doesn't Feel Right to a No That You Know Is Right

Many times we say yes despite the butterflies in our stomachs or the catch in our throats, but it doesn't have to be that way. We can learn to honor our values and wishes. We can learn to be true to ourselves and develop relationships with people who share our values. Of course, this means that we also honor when other people say no as well.

- Write down a time when you said yes when you really wanted to say no.

- What did you think would happen if you said no?

- Using the tips for saying no, write down how you would approach the situation differently. How would you say no now?

Repeat this exercise once more.

- Write down another time when you said yes when you really wanted to say no.

- What did you think would happen if you said no?

- Using the tips for saying no, write down how you would approach the situation differently. How would you say no now?

- Have you ever had someone say no to you and you continued to pressure them to say yes? How would you handle that situation differently, knowing what you know now about respecting people's boundaries?

Review Your Goal

■ Do you have the refusal skills you need to respectfully maintain your personal boundaries?

■ What are the key skills you will take away from this program? Write them here.

SUMMARY

Habits are powerful. Saying yes when we want to say no is a hard habit to break. But it's worth practicing because we can only live a healthy life when we're able to say no to choices that are bad for us. We can learn specific ways to make saying no possible and easier. First we need to learn and be clear about our own boundaries, to know that we deserve to have personal boundaries, or limits, and have a right to protect them. We can learn how to say no respectfully, directly, and honestly, and maintain our no. This allows us not only to be healthy ourselves, but to have healthy relationships with other people.

CHALLENGE

Identify one situation in the past when it was particularly hard to say no. If this is a situation that might come up again, try to think of ways that you could approach the person in an assertive way.



RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Websites

The Cool Spot

thecoolspot.gov

This government online resource has an introduction to refusal skills, including sections on resisting spoken pressure, knowing your no's, picking your no's, and resisting unspoken pressure. It is designed for teens but could be helpful for particular populations of adults.

Building Your Drink Refusal Skills Module

<http://rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/toolsresources/drinkrefusalskills.asp>

This module on the Rethinking Drinking website provides guidance on how to develop refusal skills around the use of alcohol.

**Resources Available through Hazelden Publishing
(800-328-9000, hazelden.org/bookstore)**

Boundaries: Where You End and I Begin

Anne Katherine, M.A. (Order No. 7803, E-book Order No. EB7803)

Boundaries bring order to our lives, strengthen our relationships with others and ourselves, and are essential to our mental and physical health. For those of us who have walked away from a conversation, meeting, or visit feeling violated and not understanding why, this book helps us recognize and set healthy boundaries.

Setting Boundaries

Veronica Ray (Order No. 5101)

This booklet is part of Hazelden's inspirational series for Twelve Step living and contains thirty topical affirmations to guide readers as they work to improve relationships.

