How to Say “No” and Feel Good about It

Many people have significant difficulty saying, “No,” to others when they are asked for something or when asked to do something. For many people, saying, “No,” to someone’s request may result in them feeling guilty, like they let someone down or disappointed someone else. However, not saying, “No,” to a request for something you do not want to do can result in feelings of anxiety and tension, anger, resentment and frustration.

The fact of the matter is, if you turn down someone’s request for you to do something, no one is likely to die, no one is likely to go to prison and the world will not likely come to an end. To deal with the guilt and other negative feelings that often accompany wanting to tell someone no, there is a process that can help you alleviate guilt, free yourself from having to comply with a request that you don’t want to grant and feel better about yourself because you were assertive and told someone how you really felt.

1. One of the most important things to assess when someone asks you to do something is whether or not what they’re asking for is reasonable. Sometimes people ask for things that are excessive and unreasonable, we don’t want to turn them down and then we’re faced with an overwhelming task that really wasn’t ours to begin with, and now we have to make it happen. This scenario is ripe for developing feelings of resentment toward the person who asked us and resentment towards ourselves for not turning them down.
2. If the request is something you truly cannot do or don’t want to do, accept your feelings as valid and tell the person that you can’t accept their request. It’s important not to start apologizing for turning them down and don’t lie about having to do something else as the reason you can’t honor their request. Be honest with yourself and with them. If they ask why you can’t do what they want you to do, just tell them that you don’t want to do it. You’re not being disrespectful or mean, you’re just being honest and respectful of your own feelings. Saying, “No,” in this way and for these reasons may feel very uncomfortable at first, but the more you respond this way the easier it will become. In fact, you don’t have to wait for a particular situation to use this tactic. Practice saying, “No,” while you’re alone so that saying the word no will not seem so foreign to you.