

# Why is it So Hard to Say 'No?'

*Being purposeful in setting and maintaining boundaries will provide the added strength needed to avoid getting sucked into one more thing.*

by Erin Wiley  
Community contributor

Everyone I know lately (including me) seems to be overburdened, overcommitted and running in multiple directions at the same time. We seem to be contributing to our own growing level of stress, but why? Why do we do it? Why do we take on more than we can reasonably handle in an already jam-packed calendar?

For many, it is difficulty with telling others "No."

We want to be helpful, be nice, be accommodating ... but sometimes it comes at a price to our mental and physical health. So what are we afraid of really? Why is there fear in telling others that we just can't accommodate their need(s)?

I often hear from patients that they hate conflict because they worry others will be angry with them or will think they are rude; they are afraid they will lose status or the admiration of others; they fear they will not get asked again and might miss future opportunities; or they worry they won't be viewed as a "team player."

While some of these fears may be founded, over-committing yourself to the detriment of your wellbeing is not worth it in the end.

When a patient is finally regaining control over their time and schedule, I rarely hear them express disappointment in not having gone the extra mile for someone else's project when they are stress-free and enjoying something they wanted to do instead.

Here are some phrases for you to practice, so the next time someone



Photo courtesy of Erin Wiley

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wants a slice of your time you'll find it easier to turn them down, and preserve your sanity in the process.

### Buy some time

My first suggestion is to buy yourself time. When someone asks if you can bake cupcakes for the class party, let them know you'll have to check your calendar and get back to them because you aren't sure you will have time that week to commit. Then it also might be

easier to "let someone down" because you could respond to that request via text or IM. You can build up to telling someone "no" face-to-face in time.

**Over-committing yourself to the detriment of your wellbeing is not worth it in the end.**

If someone asks me, "What are you doing tomorrow night?" I never tell them straight away. I always ask, "Why? What's up?," so that I can hear what they are suggesting and decide it's something in which I am truly interested. A free ticket to the theater? That might be worth changing plans or getting a babysitter.

A chance to help you watch your kids (while simultaneously watching my own and trying to unwind from a long week of work)? Maybe not in my best interest.

"I would love to help you, but ... " is a great way to start an answer that will protect you, and your time. "I'm already committed," is another phrase that let's them know you might have helped out of you weren't already busy.

### Maybe next time

Another way to resist committing to something you'd rather not do: "I can't right now, but try me again next time." Being purposeful in setting and maintaining boundaries when it comes to your time and commitments will give you the added strength you need to avoid getting sucked into one more thing.

Pause a moment, take a deep breath and honor yourself when you don't want to do something by saying "no." A few months of restricting your commitments will result in a much less stressed-out you ... and that's worth shooting for!