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214 — Friday Fix: 10 Ways To Say No and Stick To It

Welcome to The Verywell Mind Podcast! I’m Amy Morin, editor-in-chief of Verywell Mind. I’m also a psychotherapist and a best-selling author of four books on mental strength.

You’re listening to the Friday Fix. Every Friday, I share a quick mental strength strategy that can help fix the thoughts, feelings, and actions that can hold you back in life.

And the fun part is we usually record the show from a sailboat in the Florida Keys. Today, we’re actually on land because there’s a tropical storm in the Keys.

Don’t forget to subscribe to us on your favorite platform so you can get mental strength tips delivered to you every single week.

Now let’s dive into today’s episode!

Today I’m talking about how to say no. And I’m going to give you 10 ways you can do it—and stick to it with actual responses you can borrow.

But before we dive in and talk about how to say no, let’s take a second to acknowledge why it’s so hard to do.
One big reason is that we’re people pleasers. We want to make other people happy at the expense of our own duties. So we sometimes say yes to things to avoid disappointing people or because we want to be liked.

Another reason is FOMO. We worry that if we say no to something, we’ll miss out on an amazing opportunity. Like what if you say no to an invitation to do something fun and your friends end up having the time of their lives? Or what if you say no to a business opportunity and you never get another chance to do something like that again?

Finally, our self-worth sometimes depends on our feedback from others. Even if we don’t really have time to fit in that extra project the boss wants us to do, we say yes because we’re hoping they’ll call out how amazing we are for getting it done.

But, saying yes to too many things comes at a huge price.

It might damage your relationships either because you grow resentful of how much you’re doing for others or because you can’t honor all those commitments you made and other people get upset.

Saying yes to too many things also means you spread yourself too thin to actually doing anything well.

You can also hurt your mental health by doing too much. If you’re running around feeling stressed out all the time because of all the things you said yes to that you don’t really want to do, you won’t have time to take care of yourself and do things you really want to do.

When we say yes to too many things we have to make up the time elsewhere. So we might not get as much sleep, we skip going to the gym, or we give up time with our loved ones because we’ve committed to doing things that really don’t matter to us that much.

But we all have trouble saying no sometimes. And sometimes it’s because it’s hard to know how to say it.
When your friend invites you to do something and you’d rather have a root canal than do whatever it is they’re excited to do but you don’t want to hurt their feelings, how do you decline?

It’s even tougher when something offers to do something nice for you—but you don’t want their help. How do you say no to a coworker who insists on brainstorming a project with you when you actually don’t want their help? Or how do you say no when your in-laws insist on helping you pack for your upcoming move if you really don’t want their help?

Here are 10 ways you can say no.

1. **Say no without an explanation.** The simplest thing you can do is to just decline without giving an excuse. You can say something like “Unfortunately, that won’t work for me” or “I’ll have to pass.” Then, move on without offering an extensive explanation.

2. **Respond by acknowledging a constraint of some sort.** Make it clear that you have some sort of limitation but keep it vague. Say, “That’s just not going to fit in my schedule right now,” or “I don’t have the energy to invest in something like that right now.” When I get professional requests to do things that I don’t want to do, I sometimes say, “I’m working on some tight deadlines right now so I won’t be able to.” It’s usually true. As an author, there are always deadlines for my next book. But no one ever asks what those deadlines are.

3. **Insert a qualifier.** If you want to ensure you sound polite, insert something that shows you are happy that they asked. You might say, “I appreciate the offer, but I just can’t make that happen right now.” Or, “I am honored that you thought of me but unfortunately that won’t work.”
4. **Offer a specific reason.** While you don’t want to get into a long winded excuse, you might find it’s helpful to give a specific reason like, “I don’t have anyone to watch the kids,” or, “I have to work late that day.” Just know that the other person might try to solve your problem by offering to get together on another night or by saying your kids can come to their home. So if you’re giving a specific reason, make sure it’s accurate.

5. **Say it’s not something you want to do.** Rather than blame a lack of time, make it clear that it’s a lack of interest. If someone is asking you to do something, like partner with them on a business or your friend invites you to go camping and camping isn’t something you want to do, don’t give them any false hope that you might change your mind or you’ll do it when you have more time. Instead, say something like, “This isn’t a good fit for me,” or “That’s not really my thing.”

7. **Say you’re going to need more time.** I don’t recommend you ever say this unless you really do need a minute to think about it. If you know your answer is no, use one of the other ideas so that you don’t leave someone in a state of uncertainty if you have no intentions of saying yes. But this works well if you tend to say yes to everything by default. Just say, “I have to check my schedule and get back to you,” or “I’ll check with my partner and let you know later today.” Don’t invest a lot of time into thinking about it and wavering on your decision though. Check to see if it’s feasible, get back to them, and move on.

8. **Offer an alternative.** If you want to help someone but you can’t do it, you might offer an alternative option—like another person who can help or another day you could attend. Say something like, “That isn’t something I am interested in right now but I can introduce you to someone who might be,” or,
“I’m not a fan of big crowds so I’ll pass but I’m happy to spend time with you when you’re doing something more low key.”

9. **Explain that you feel conflicted.** If it sounds like something you want to do but it’s just not a good time or you aren’t absolutely sure, you can explain how you’re feeling. Just be prepared that they might pressure you into changing your mind. But expressing that you’d like to do something but just can’t might also encourage them to keep you in mind next time. Say something like, “It sounds interesting but I don’t want to overcommit myself,” or “I would love to go but this week just won’t work for me.”

10. **Ignore it.** It’s not kind to ignore your friends and family or your colleagues so I don’t recommend using this with them. But all those messages you get from people you hardly know asking to pick your brain, give a talk for free, or volunteer at an event, don’t have to be answered. You can ignore them and move on and you’ll save a lot of time and headaches with all the back-and-forth. It will feel weird at first if you’re not used to doing that, but remind yourself that you are not under any obligation to reply to every email, text message, or social media request that comes your way.

So those are some ideas that can help you say no. Be prepared though, that other people don’t always like to take no for an answer. That’s where sticking to your no becomes important.

If someone tries to get you to change your mind or they try to guilt you into doing something, call them out on what you see they’re doing, affirm your answer is still no and end the conversation.

You might say, “I see you are trying to guilt me into going but my answer is still no. I don’t want to talk about it anymore right now.”

If they bring it up again, you can give them another reminder that you’re not talking about it and again, end the conversation.
If you have trouble saying no, pick a few of those responses and keep them handy. Use them as needed and you’ll likely find that over time, saying no gets easier. And when you say no to more things that you don’t want to do, you have more time and energy to focus on the things that are most important to you.

Like with most things, saying no gets easier with practice. And while it might evoke some anxiety at first, you’ll find that over time, you’ll get more comfortable saying no.

If you know someone who could benefit from saying no more often, share this show with them. Simply sharing a link to this episode could help someone feel better and grow stronger.

Do you want free access to my online course? It’s called “10 Mental Strength Exercises That Will Help You Reach Your Greatest Potential.” To get your free pass, all you have to do is leave us a review on Apple Podcasts or Spotify. Then, send us a screenshot of your review. Our email address is podcast@verywell.com. We’ll reply with your all-access pass to the course.

Thank you for hanging out with me today and listening to The Verywell Mind Podcast!

And as always, a big thank you to my show’s producer (who has no problem giving me a really quick no when I try to convince him to go to my favorite restaurant with me since it’s his least favorite restaurant), Nick Valentin.