

Some people find it exceedingly difficult to say no. This often means that they spend a great deal of their time doing things for other people that they really do not want to do. This can often lead to a gradual build-up of resentment and frustration which can poison relationships. It also means that people often feel that they have little control over their time and their life in general. It is rather like feeling flooded and not being able to turn the tap off. Saying 'no' to the demands of others is the equivalent of turning off the tap of external demands or stresses. It puts you in the driver's seat and means that you have more control over your life and time.

■ Beliefs about Saying 'No'

- 1 There appear to be a number of key beliefs which would predispose people to have difficulty saying 'no'. These beliefs need to be challenged and modified.
 - a Saying 'no' is rude and aggressive.
 - b Saying 'no' is unkind, uncaring and selfish.
 - c Saying 'no' will hurt and upset others and make them feel rejected.
 - d If I say 'no' to somebody they will cease to like me.
 - e Other's needs are more important than mine.
 - f Saying 'no' over little things is small minded and petty.
- 2 The key to refusing requests and saying 'no' is to be able to accept the following belief.
 - a 'Other people have the right to ask, and I have the right to refuse'.
 - b 'When you say "no" you are refusing a request, not rejecting a person'.
We may have come to associate saying 'no' with rejection, but refusal does not have to mean rejection. Refusing the behaviour or request and rejecting the person are two quite different things.
 - c When we say 'yes' to one thing we are actually saying no to something else. We always have a choice and we are continuously making choices.
- 3 People who have difficulty saying 'no' usually over estimate the difficulty that the other

person will have in accepting the refusal. By expressing our feelings openly and honestly, it actually liberates the other person to express their feelings. By saying 'no' to somebody it allows them to say 'no' to your requests while still also being able to ask for further requests.

■ Hints for saying 'no'

- 4 a As a rule keep it brief – avoid long rambling justifications.
- b Be polite – saying something like, 'thank you for asking . . . '.
- c Speak slowly with warmth otherwise 'no' may sound abrupt.
- d Be honest about your feelings. It may help to say 'I find this difficult'.

■ Ways of saying 'no'

- 5 a *Direct 'no'*. The aim is to say no without apologising. The other person has the problem but you do not have to allow him or her to pass it on to you. A direct no can be quite forceful and can be effective with salespeople.
- b *Reflecting 'no'*. This technique involves reflecting back the content and feeling of the request, but adding your assertive refusal at the end. For example; 'I know you're looking forward to a walk this afternoon, but I can't come'.
- c *Reasoned 'no'*. This gives, very briefly, the genuine reason for the refusal. For example; 'I can't come for a walk this afternoon because I've got to work on my book'.
- d *Raincheck 'no'*. This says 'no' to the present request but leaves room for negotiation. For example; 'I can't come for a walk this afternoon, but I'd like to go this evening'.
- e *Enquiring 'no'*. This is not a definite 'no' and again could be a prelude to negotiation. For example; 'Is there any other time you'd like to go?'
- f *Broken record 'no'*. This involves repeating a simple statement of refusal over and over again if the requester is very persistent. For example; 'No, I don't want to this afternoon'. 'Oh come on it's a lovely day', 'No I don't want to this afternoon'.