

## 50. Learn to say "No"

Saying "No" can be very difficult. Often we think we have to meet the expectations of others. It can sometimes be a challenging, anxiety-filled act to set limits. But when we do things against our will or against our own needs at the time, we can end up feeling used and resentful. A simple and direct "No, I am not able to listen to you right now" is often the best solution.

If someone makes a request of us, it's fair to ask for time to think it over. We can do so and get back to them later. Do we really want to comply? If not, then "No" is the honest answer. We can use an empathic "No" if we find ourselves listening to things that are attacking or harmful. It is not until we can actually, honestly and easily say "No," that our "Yes" begins to truly mean "Yes" and our "No" begins to truly mean "No."

Here are five different ways to say "No." 1. The direct "No": "No" means "No"; 2. The reflecting "No": we acknowledge the content and feeling of a request, then add the assertive refusal at the end; 3. The reasoned "No": we give a brief and genuine reason for the refusal without opening up further negotiation; 4. The rain check "No": A way of saying "No" to a specific request without giving a definite "No"; 5. The broken record: Repeat the simple statement of refusal again and again. It's often necessary to use this with persistent requests, especially from children.

*Practice: Pay attention to times when you say "Yes" and later realize you really wish you had said "No." Find some compassionate way to go back and offer a "retroactive No." In other words, just because we've said "Yes" initially, doesn't mean we can't say "No" later, and say "No" the next time if feels right to do so. Becoming a skilled listener does not mean you have to listen to everyone and everything all the time.*

## 51. Watch for compassion fatigue

The world is filled with pain and suffering – the First Noble Truth has a reality basis to it. None of us gets through life without being touched by heartache or traumatic experiences. Sometimes, listening to the pain and suffering of others can cause us to close off our hearts. And a closed heart can't love as fully or listen as deeply as an open heart.

What is one to do when there is so much pain in the world and the heart is so vulnerable? How does one listen and not fall victim to compassion fatigue? One way is to make it a point to balance seeing the beauty around us that is as equally abundant as the pain and suffering. Natural environments can be profoundly restorative, and by breathing in the beauty of Mother Earth and the mystery of creation, we can take time for renewal, time required to sustain us in listening to others' pain.

Practicing gratitude is one more good way to keep a heart open and ready to reach out to listen and love and to receive the love and grace from others. For it's not so much the ears we use to hear with, as it is our hearts.

*Practice: Find the gift, the abundance, the beauty in the world around you this very minute. Look at the clouds, the sun, or the rain, or the birds outside your window. Remember that you are part of creation beyond our comprehension. Slowly breathe in a belly full of that mystery and grace.*