

The Art of the Compassionate No: A Worksheet

Keys

- a. A compassionate “no” allows us to reject a proposal while respecting the underlying relationship between the asker and the naysayer.
 - b. Saying “no” is part of a healthy culture where each of us takes on only what we’re genuinely wanting or willing to do. We can only truly say “yes” where we can also say “no.”
 - c. A compassionate “no” guides us to the possibility of finding creative solutions where everyone’s needs and interests are respected.
1. Think of the situation where you’d like to say “no.” Write one to two sentences describing the situation without getting into your thoughts and ideas about it. **Simply, what happened?**
 2. Why do you want to say “no”? Explain it and use [this resource](#) to identify 1-3 of the most important needs behind your “no.”
 3. Translate your *why* into an opening that they are likely to be able to hear. You cannot control how they respond, but you assure them, for instance, that you’ve taken their request seriously and that what came up for you was the importance of [your *why*].
 4. Craft a direct and clear “no” to their request—a **single sentence, please**.
 5. Draft a respectful question and a guess as to why the request they made might be important to them.

Question example: Can you help me understand why you were hoping I’d do this?”
Guess example: “I’m wondering if you were hoping to relieve stress by having me take this project on?”
 6. Imagine alternative things that you’d be genuinely willing to do to support helping them meet their goals/interests/needs (assuming for the moment that your guess is correct).

Further Notes on a Compassionate “No”

- There is no right way to say “no”
 - A compassionate no is most useful when you want to make boundaries while tending to your relationship
- “No” is a complete sentence
 - In some cases, it is right to simply say “no” and leave it at that. This is particularly true when protecting yourself or others is at stake.
- A compassionate “no” is a practice and a skill that takes time to build.
 - With practice, you’ll be capable of doing it on the spot. It will sound natural, too!
 - However, as you learn, there may be situations where you lack the time to adequately reflect on the whole process.
 - In those situations, I recommend simply connecting to your *why*. The more connected you can be to what’s motivating your “no,” the clearer you can be on the spot—no matter whether you’re engaging with each discrete step.