



# 21 ways to say NO, clearly & respectfully

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## Pro Tips

1. Express gratitude/empathy/kindness for being "asked".
2. State your boundary clearly. (Is it about time, space, environment, behavior, topic?)
3. Consider offering an alternative (eg. a different time, place, or idea).
4. Do not over-explain. This takes away from your message.
5. Do not awkwardly take it back right away.
6. No need to say "I'm sorry". It's much better to say "thank you for understanding".
7. If you struggle to leave situations, build in time limits and exit plans to support you.

**HOW TO PRACTICE?** Once you have your favorite phrases, practice saying them in the mirror until they come out more naturally. Memorize them (or keep a copy on your phone) so you can lean on them when you feel flustered or caught off guard.

## Ways to express basic NO thank yous!

1. Thanks for thinking of me, but I can't. Maybe next time?
2. Thank you but karaoke's not my jam. How about.... Instead?
3. I'd love to go but it's been a long week and I don't have the energy for that right now.
4. I'd love to help, but I have no capacity to do that right now. Thanks for understanding.
5. I've got too much going on and don't have the time or energy to commit.
6. I appreciate your confidence in me, but I am maxed right now and can't take on any more projects (until...)
7. I only want to take on projects that I can complete at my best so I can't take on any new tasks right now. Thanks for understanding.
8. I'd love to drop everything and be there for you but I can't. Let's meet tomorrow after I'm done with my work/family/own commitments.
9. I hear that you're upset and I'm sorry you are going through a hard time. I'd like to be fully present for this conversation & I can't do that right now. How about...
10. Thanks for asking, but that project/activity/trip is not in line with the person I want to be.
11. Thanks for the invite, but I've committed to focusing my energy on my health/my school/this promotion right now. How about next month?
12. It's really hard for me to say no. Please respect what I need and don't pressure me by asking again.

## Ways to express your NEEDS without actually saying NO:

13. I work best when I'm not surrounded by noise. Let's come back to this after I work alone for an hour and we can brainstorm together then.
14. I'm not my best self when I'm being yelled at and I don't want to say anything I'll regret. This topic is important. Let's talk about this tonight when we're both calm.
15. I need time & space to process big ideas. Can you please email me (eg. *your ideas, the meeting agenda*) in advance, so I can have time to process first and be ready for a productive conversation.
16. That plan doesn't work for me because I don't feel safe when I can't control my food allergies. Can we please meet X instead?



## Ways to address TOPIC specific boundaries:

17. I love spending time with you, but when you talk about your toxic EX all the time, I feel drained. How about from now on you get a 5 mins vent session, then we move on to more positive topics.
18. I've been doing a lot of self-reflecting and I've realized hearing complaints about others leaves me feeling really depleted. I don't want to participate in gossip anymore.
19. Thank you for inviting me over, but I feel uncomfortable when you are drinking. I love you & I love brunch- how about we stick to morning plans instead?
20. It's clear we disagree about X and these conversations never go well. Let's focus our energy on topics that leave us both feeling good.
21. When you ask me X, I feel frustrated and I get defensive. I don't like this pattern we fall in to, so please do not ask me anymore. I love you and want to have a relationship with you but I will leave or end the conversation if you do this again.