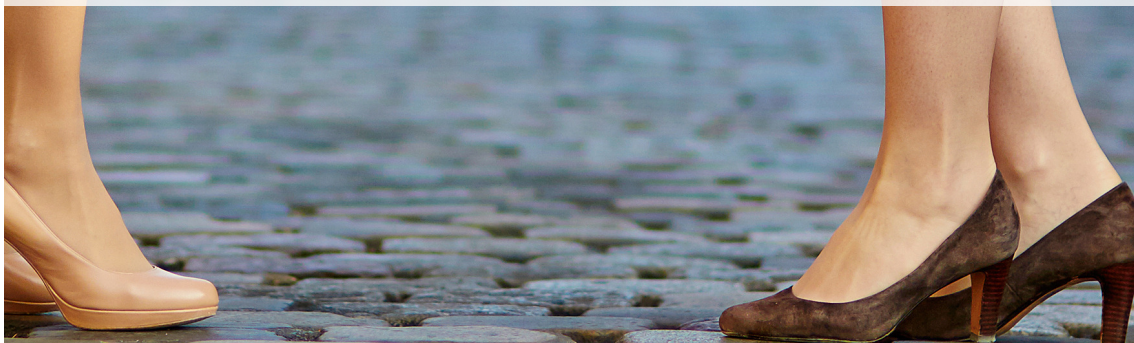




THE ART OF SAYING "NO" WITH GRACE AND RESPECT

Learn how saying "No" can improve your relationships and help you feel better



Charlene Richard RCSW

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Introduction

Hello! I'm so happy you decided to read this book so you can learn how to say "no" in a comfortable way. As in: "Nope", "No thank you", "Nah", "Ummm... no". Yes, I'm making light of saying "no", but it really is a serious problem for many women. As a woman you may have been raised and socialized to take care of others and put their needs first, this is not uncommon. Overtime this can lead to complete neglect of your own needs and trust me, this is not good.... for anyone!

As a therapist, and coach, I usually meet women when they are unhappy or overwhelmed. This can be for a variety of reasons, but it often boils down to either:

- 1) overwhelming feelings such as intense anger, sadness, or worry, or
- 2) problems with a relationship

Often overwhelming feelings can lead to problems in a relationship and it all just becomes too much – time for help!

Prior to studying clinical Social Work and becoming a Cognitive Behavioral Therapist and Life Coach, I had very limited Emotional Intelligence. Emotional intelligence includes four different skill sets:

- 1) the ability to recognize your emotions as you are experiencing them,
- 2) the ability to regulate, or manage, your emotions in a healthy way,
- 3) the ability to recognize emotions in other people and
- 4) the ability to communicate effectively and manage healthy relationships with people.

Prior to talking about feelings for a living, I had limited awareness of my own feelings and very limited skills in expressing myself in a healthy and proactive way. In the past if I didn't want to do something with someone, I would find ways to avoid them for long periods of time, until they either gave up asking or until the event was over. This allowed me to avoid

saying the big, bad “no” to anyone and while I was able to avoid saying “no”, it did not do great things for my relationships.

Before my clinical training I was also completely unaware of the mind/body connection and how my feelings were impacting my physical health. I was not aware that high levels of stress, worry and anger were negatively impacting my body on a regular basis. I didn't know that every time I got angry, or really stressed out, that my body would release stress hormones and my heart rate would increase and my blood sugar would get all messed up. I had no idea of the harm I was causing my body because I couldn't say “no” and I didn't have the skills to manage and communicate my emotions in a healthy way..... and then I became a therapist.

My passion in life is to share with people just how simple it is to start recognizing emotions and communicating them in a healthy way. Notice I didn't say easy, just simple. In particular, I have worked with so many women who ignore their needs and stuff their emotions, all in the service of taking care of loved ones. The end result is rarely good. It leads to resentment, emotional exhaustion, unhappy relationships and in the worst of situations, it can lead to physical illness and disease.

I don't say this to scare you, but I want you to know that no one else on this earth is responsible for your happiness and your health except you. No one else will look out for your wellbeing the way you can. You need to remember this when you start to question whether you should really assert yourself and your needs. You need to remember that your health and your relationships are in your hands when you start to fear saying “no” to someone or something. While it is simple to learn how to recognize and manage emotions, it is not easy. It takes work. It takes commitment. It takes trial and error until you learn what strategies work best for you.

One of the pleasant side effects that I usually see in women who start to say “no” and who start to refocus some care and energy on themselves, is an increase in energy, freedom, joy and happiness. Small changes lead to significant results. I often work with women until they

get to the point of “I have too much good in my life, how do I prioritize it”. Well dear, if that’s your problem, I’m happy to have been a part of causing it.

A beautiful thing starts to happen when women have more energy, freedom, joy and happiness – you start to give to others from a place of compassion and joy. You no longer give to others because you feel you have to, with a side of resentment. You are not a martyr. Now you give because you are so happy that you want others around you to be happy. You have the energy and desire to really connect with loved ones from a place of joy. Your time together has more quality because you are really present. Sex gets better. Life is just plain fun!

Women are caregivers by nature and this is not a bad thing. It’s only bad when it comes at the expense of your own health and wellness. You deserve and need to take care of yourself before you take care of anyone else. It will be the best gift you give yourself and your loved ones. Now try it, say it out loud with me, “no”, “nope”, “no thank you”, “I’m trying really hard to keep my health and wellbeing a priority, so I’m going to have to decline your offer”, “thank you for the opportunity, however, I will not be able to participate”. See, it’s simple.

This book will provide you with the motivation and strategies you need to say “no” to people in a polite and respectful way. You will learn how to manage your fears as you execute your “no” to friends, family, colleagues, management and any other random who tries to take some of your precious time and energy (yes, I’m looking at you sales people in the middle of the shopping malls!).

I truly wish you all the best as you learn this invaluable skill. As you begin to see changes you will continue to be motivated for more changes, to set boundaries, to identify new goals for yourself and above all else, take care of yourself everyday!

Charlene

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The thought of saying “no” totally freaks me out!

Saying “no” and your body

Okay, I know the thought of saying “no” might be a little scary at first. When I first bring this subject up in a therapy or coaching session I am usually met with widening eyes. I see fear. I know the thought of actually saying “no” can be downright terrifying to some. If you are already scared, have no fear – we will take gradual steps to help you get comfortable with the process.

Here is your first action. For the next week, if you are not comfortably saying “no” you don’t have to. What I would like you to do is look for opportunities where, if fear were not an issue, that you would like to say “no”. I want you to stop in these moment and think about what it would be like to say “no”. I want you to mentally scan your body and see what you are feeling physically as you contemplate saying the big “no”. Do you feel tension in your stomach, chest, neck, jaw or ears? Is your heart rate increasing? Is your face flushed? Do you find it difficult to breath? Are you getting sweaty, nauseous, dizzy? What exactly happens in your body when you’re contemplating saying “no”.

Write down what happens in your body when you think of saying “no”.

Managing Your Internal Freakout

Now that you know what you feel in your body when you want to say “no”, it’s time to learn how to manage that internal freakout. When we get to the actual strategies you will use to communicate your needs, and your “no”, we do not want you flustered and blurting

out something incoherent... or worse, something rude that could damage your relationship. You need to learn how to calm your body so you can calm your mind.

The first strategy you can use to manage your internal freak out is the Extended Exhale 3-6 breathing exercise. This exercise was taught to me during a training for working with people who have experienced trauma. I teach it to each and every person that I work with, and at least 95% of people really enjoy and benefit from it.

This is a deep breathing exercise. Before you begin I want to talk about the difference between a deep breath and a shallow breath. I want you to lay down and breathe. I want you to look down and see if your stomach is rising or if your chest is rising. The proper way to breathe is to have a full deep breath so that your stomach rises. Think of a baby and how they look when they breathe.

We are born knowing how to breathe properly, but then we grown up, get all stressed out and start to shallow breath so often we begin to think that is the normal way. It is not. I want you to practice breathing so you notice your stomach is rising. It make take some getting used to at first, but you need to be able to recognize the difference, how it feels in your stomach, so that you can do it on a regular basis and it moments of stress.

Another tip to a good deep breathing practice is to make sure you fully exhale before you take your first deep breath. If you are stressed, scared or angry you may have been shallow breathing for sometime and have likely inhaled more air than you need. If you try to take a deep breath without fully exhaling you may begin to gasp and there is nothing relaxing about that!

Now that you know the difference between a deep breath and a shallow breath, it is time to practice the 3-6 breathing method. Enjoy...

The Extended Exhale (3-6) Breathing Exercise – Calm your Body, Calm your Mind

Step 1: For the next 30 seconds I want you to just breathe as you currently are. If you have a timer on your phone, set it so you don't have to pay attention to a clock. Once the 30 seconds is over, I want you to reflect on the following: Was your breath shallow or deep, was it smooth or jagged? Write it down.

Step 2: Now I want you to focus on counting your breath. I want you to inhale for three counts and exhale for six counts. The science behind this is that you physiologically relax on the exhale, so you want your exhale to be longer than your inhale. I want you to inhale a deep breath through your nose for three counts, DO NOT PAUSE, and then exhale for six counts. Repeat. Do this for 30 seconds and then reflect the following: Was your breath deep or shallow, smooth or jagged? How does your body feel? If you find yourself getting dizzy, reduce the exhale to 5 or 4. Overtime, as you practice, you will have the ability for a much longer exhale. Write down your experience.

Step 3: Sipping. Imagine you have a straw in your mouth and you are breathing through that straw. This is much more controlled and your exhale takes much longer. I want you to spend the next minute doing the 3-6 breathing count, but on your exhale I want you to exhale through your mouth as if you have a straw in it (or actually grab and cut a straw and use that to exhale). You will inhale through your nose for the count of three and exhale through your straw mouth for 6. Once you are done, reflect on this experience, how do you feel?

The 3-6 breathing is the main foundational skill for managing your nervous system (internal freakout) and managing your emotions. In the first part of this book you learned how to recognize what is taking place in your body when you contemplated saying “no”. The next step is to implement the 3-6 breathing as soon as you recognize this nervous/stressed feeling.

This breathing relaxation exercise triggers your relaxation response (your parasympathetic nervous system) and calms down your stress nervous system (your sympathetic nervous system). You have just learned how to recognize your stress system and how to interrupt it by activating your relaxation system. This skill alone is GOLDEN and will serve you well for the rest of your life. I want you to practice this exercise when you are very relaxed so that it becomes something your body recognizes overtime as “time to relax”. This will make it easier to trigger the relaxation response when you are feeling stressed and begin your breathing practice.

The purpose of activating your relaxation system when you feel stress, worry or anger, is so that your brain can move from the emotional, reactive part, to the logical, rational, problem solving part. We all know that when we are really angry or scared that we have a hard time problem solving or staying rational. If we become overwhelmed by our emotions we are likely to react in a way that is not helpful or healthy. If we pause, take some deep breaths, calm down and reflect, we are much more likely to respond in a positive and healthy manner. Stop Reacting. Start Responding.

Now for the next week I want you to notice situations where you would like to say no, but are scared to. I want you to scan your body, recognize where you feel discomfort and I want you to pause and do the 3-6 breathing for a few moments. This will allow you to practice managing your emotions in the moment so that you can move onto the next step – verbalizing your needs and asserting yourself with a polite “no”.

Saying “no” in a polite and respectful way

Start Small with your “no”s

Now that you have some mad skills in recognizing and managing the fear that comes with saying “no”, it is time to start saying it. It can be helpful to start small and start with less fear provoking situations to say “no” in. If the thought of saying “no” to your mother is still quite terrifying then don’t start with Mom. If it’s your boss who you’d really like to start saying “no” to, but you are still too nervous, don’t start with her or him.

Start with safe people. If you have a good relationship with your sister, spouse or co-worker, start there. Look for opportunities to say, “no thank you” when they offer you something that maybe you don’t want (an extra helping of dinner, a coffee, a plant they are trying to get rid of).

If you are a person who has said “yes” to everyone and everything your whole life, you may run into some reactions of shock from others. They may try to ignore your “no” and push their offer on to you. You can breathe, and respond with, “thank you, I have thought about it, and I’m okay without it”. It may take some time for people to recognize that you are setting a boundary and that you are keeping that boundary set. At first this may not be met with happy reactions.

By changing your regular response you are upsetting a system that has likely taken place for years. If you feel your fear/guilt/anger creeping in, pause, breathe and trust in the process of setting boundaries and asserting them with “no”. Over time, as you continue to assert yourself, people will adjust and respect your boundaries. If they do not, you may be in the unfortunate position of evaluating the role you want this person to have in your life.

Pulling Out the Big Guns – The EDC Model of Communication

Once you are comfortable saying “no” to smaller requests, it is time to start saying “no” to bigger requests for your time and energy. Think about the positive experiences you have had with saying “no” so far and use this as motivation to once again overcome the fear/guilt/anger that comes when you want to say “no” to bigger request.

The EDC Model of Communication is my “go to” method for communicating something important. The EDC Model of Communication stands for Empathize, Describe and Clarify. I learned this strategy when I was in grad school and I have no idea who the original source is - but it is not me (if you know who, please let me know so I can credit them:).

Now back to the EDC model. We start with **empathizing** because it allows us to let the other person know that we really understand where they are coming from. By letting them know right away that we understand their point of view, we are allowing them to actually listen to us, instead of focusing on how to argue their point the moment we stop talking. Now this does not mean that you have to agree with their point of view, but it does mean that you understand how they are experiencing it. Next is the **Describe** stage - here you describe the situation from your experience in an objective and rational manner. You describe the impact on you as you experience it. The final stage is to **Clarify** your needs or how you would like to see the situation progress.

Here is an example of how you might assert yourself and say no to a request from a friend/sibling to help with a project they volunteered to do: "**EMPATHIZE** I understand that this work is important to you and you are feeling stressed about getting it completed on time. **DESCRIBE** I am concerned that I won't have enough time to help you and get my errands done in time to get home for our family dinner. **CLARIFY** If you want help in the future please let me know in advance so I can plan for it and help you out." In this example you are showing that you are a friend and a support, but you are not willing to drop everything to respond to their need. Over time people will start to recognize your boundaries and you will get less requests for tasks they are capable of completing themselves.

Often our female friends and family tend to have the same problem with saying “no” and they take on way more than they can manage in a healthy way. They may have gotten used to asking you for help, and you may be used to responding with “yes”. This cannot continue if you want to free up time and energy for your own needs and your own care. What you are doing when you assert yourself like this, is modelling a healthy way to set and assert boundaries. You may even inspire the women in your life to say “no” themselves once they start to see the happy, healthy changes you are experiencing as a result of saying “no”.

This way of communicating can seem unnatural at first. It may also still feel a little scary to start saying “no” to bigger requests that could lead to higher conflict. If you are still nervous, take the next week to look at opportunities to say “no” to big request. A big request doesn’t necessarily mean that they are asking something huge of you - although they may be - a big request is something that will take a good chunk of your time or energy (watching someone’s child all evening, taking on time-consuming tasks at work, etc.). I want you to spend some time thinking about their request and then reflect on the EDC process and draft your statement to them – play around with it until it feels comfortable and in your own words.

When you get a request it can be immensely helpful to delay your response. Putting time in between the request and your response allows you to logically evaluate your time and energy and the request that is being made. You can let the person know that you have to check your schedule, or check a prior commitment, before you can give them an answer. You can give them the heads up that you might not be available so that they can start to look for other supports as well. This will give you the time to formulate your EDC statement, breathe, practice it and practice it again.

Once you have your solid EDC statement ready to go, contact them and ask them if it is a good time to talk. Make sure they are not distracted and can really hear you. Now execute your fabulous “no”.

I Said “No” But They Won’t Listen

WTWhat?!? “I said ‘no’ but they won’t listen to me and they keep on pressuring me!”

Unfortunately this sometimes happens. You can get angry and yell. You can get sad and give in. Or you can look at this as an opportunity to strengthen your “no” muscle. Think of it as weight training for your thoughts and emotions.

Imagine your sister, who has a history of making her problems become your problems, comes to you again and asks you to do something that you know will take a huge amount of time and energy. You’re feeling good, you know how the fear of saying “no” feels, you’re breathing to keep your mind calm, you execute a beautiful EDC statement and then she ignores you and just repeats her request – this time with extra pleading, bordering on begging. This is not uncommon, especially if you have a long standing history of giving in and saying “yes”. This is your time to flex your new muscles. I would invite you to pause, breathe, smile in a genuine way (I’m sure she really does feel her crisis is your crisis) and now repeat your EDC statement for a second time.

Do. Not. Waiver.

If you repeat this again and she does not stop pleading, you can say some form of the following...

“Sister, I can really appreciate that you are stressed and want some help. However, I have explained my situation to you and I would really like it if you would respect my choice. I love you and want you to be happy, but I cannot put my needs aside for yours in this situation”.

Use your own words for this, use what feels comfortable for you – but be sure to let her know that you have heard her, you have given her your answer and that you will not change your mind. Do not get into a back and forth argument about why you can't. You do not need to explain yourself. You were clear. You were polite. You were respectful. Remember at the beginning of the book when we talked about motivation for making these changes and how you will really need to hold on to it when you start to second guess yourself and you start to feel yourself giving into fear/guilt/anger. This is the time to grab that motivation and hold on to it for dear life. You know you are right. You are the only one who will ensure you take care of yourself. Your mind and body deserves to be taken care of and this requires you to say “no” so that you can care for yourself.

I tell the people I work with that, *“we really do train people to treat us how they treat us”*. Now I'm not saying that is true in situations of abuse, or violence. Violence is never okay. Abusive relationships are not healthy and no one trained someone else to abuse them. I'm talking about non-abusive, non-violent relationships. These are the relationships where we train people to treat us the way they do. We do this by accepting their behavior and not asserting our needs and boundaries.

You are about to change the way people treat you by asserting your needs and saying “no”. This is a beautiful process to see over time. You will be training your friends, family, spouse, colleagues and management to treat you with respect and dignity. As a result these relationships will improve and you will have more time, freedom, energy and joy. My hope is that with this new energy and freedom, you will begin to identify what nourishes you and what fosters passion and growth within you. I hope that you will start to implement time to add nourishing activities to your life on a daily basis. When you care for yourself, and feel genuine health and happiness, you will be more likely to give to your loved ones from a place of compassion and joy.... and then everyone is happier.

Next Steps

Congratulations! *You now have everything you need to start asserting your needs and freeing up your time and energy to increase your self-care and build happy, authentic relationships with the people you love.*

If You're Still Struggling

Sometimes reading about this information is not enough. Sometimes people struggle with fear of conflict, beliefs about their worth or setting concrete ways to stay on the self-care track. In these situations it could be beneficial to find a therapist or coach to work with. If you're struggling with the fear of conflict or your self-worth/self-esteem you would likely benefit more so from working with a therapist. If it's executing your boundaries and your self-care goals that is challenging for you, then a coach may be a better fit.

As a therapist and a coach I work with women in these areas on a daily basis. I'm not saying you have to look into working with me, but it might be helpful to look into finding someone to support you as you make these very important changes in your life.

How To Find a Good Therapist

The most important part of finding a therapist is to ensure you have a good "fit". What I mean by that is that you feel comfortable, not judged and safe with this person. Research shows that the best therapeutic relationship does not come from the type of therapy being done, but by the therapist/client relationship. Sometimes it can take trying out a few therapists or coaches until you find that great match. When you do find that great match it really can be a life changing experience. I have worked with various therapists and coaches in my life. Sometimes I know after the initial consultation or session that it will not be a good fit and I move on. This is part of the process.

Fortunately some therapists offer initial consultations that can give you a chance to speak with them before booking a session and using your time and money. Another way to check for fit is to read their blog.

A blog gives a good indication as to how they work and what their “voice” is like. Make sure you check out credentials and ask about professional liability insurance. You may also want to get recommendations from family or friends to see if they have someone they recommend.

Another decision to make will be if you want to work with someone face-to-face or if you prefer online therapy. I have noticed over the years that people who have the option of face-to-face or online are more often choosing online, simply because of the convenience of meeting online.

Regardless of how you choose to move forward, just know that there are unlimited strategies and techniques for making long-term healthy changes. As women, we are so lucky that we have access to ongoing education, supports and a wealth of information for personal growth.

With the internet, we can now choose who we want to work with based on fit and not simply on geographical restrictions. If you feel that something in your life isn't really working for you, your core is not happy – you have the right to make changes.

People often fear change and will stick with what is unpleasant instead of facing the unknown that change brings. Life is too precious and fleeting to stay unhappy. Find supports. Allow yourself to dream. You deserve absolute happiness and peace.

I wish you all the best in your journey of personal growth.

Charlene

Visit www.charlenerichardrsw.com today or e-mail info@charlenerichardrsw.com with your project needs! Or visit my [Facebook Page](#)

About the Author



Charlene Richard is a registered clinical social worker, trained as a behavioral therapist in Addictions and Mental Health with a side passion for Compassion Fatigue Resiliency.

Charlene is the founder of www.CharleneRichardRSW.com offering online behavioral therapy and classes for people who struggle with stress, anxiety, perfectionism, self-esteem, emotional eating and ADHD. Therapy is limited to people in North America. The classes are available for everyone.

She is an author, speaker, and founder of [Caring Safely™](#) an online program to help people and organizations prevent compassion fatigue and burnout.

In 2015, she published [20 Quick Strategies to Help Patients and Clients Manage Stress](#). This book is for helping professionals who works with clients/patients dealing with stressful situations.

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