

4. Saying 'yes' and no' with confidence

The following The Indian Model School tips will help you say 'no', which is sometimes the most useful response but something that many people find hard to do.

Why we have difficulties saying 'no'

Our belief system: We believe that saying 'no' is selfish and uncooperative so we tend to feel guilty when we do it.

Personal needs: We enjoy the feeling of being wanted and needed that requests (even unreasonable ones) bring and answering 'yes' will usually get a response that satisfies our need to be liked.

Lack of skills and experience saying 'no': We don't know how to say 'no' assertively. We weren't taught to say 'no' in ways that don't hurt the feelings of others. We weren't taught to value saying 'no'.

Our perception of our work role: We have a belief that as we are paid to do our job, we should try and fix problems and satisfy parents, students and other stakeholders. 'The customer is always right' easily translates to, 'People might see me as incompetent if I can't provide the solution they want'.

It serves the purpose of distracting us from other tasks: Time allocated to trying to meet unreasonable needs is time that can't be spent on something we can't or don't want to do.

To avoid potential confrontations: Very few people enjoy a confrontation and the path of least resistance can be to avoid saying 'no'.

Good reasons for saying 'no'

A good role model: You will be a good role model for other staff members. When you turn down a person you are indicating that it is acceptable for them to occasionally refuse you and that your relationship isn't based on saying 'yes' all the time.

Increased respect: You will be respected more. So will others including, more often than not, the people you turn down.

Increases creativity: When you say 'no', you encourage others to come up with their own creative solutions.

More control over your time: You will have more control over your time and therefore your life. Until you have trained yourself away from the habit of saying 'yes' too often, other people will have more control over your time than you will. That leads to you feeling powerless, or at least less powerful.

Seven points to remember

- When you say 'no' you are refusing a request, not rejecting a person. Saying 'no' does not mean a rejection. Much depends on the way you refuse.
- When making a refusal, accept full responsibility for doing so. Don't blame or pass the buck. Unless it is outside your power or ability to say 'yes', don't say 'I can't' when you mean 'I don't want to'.
- Saying 'no' does not need excessive apology or excuse, although you may choose to make some explanation. Ask yourself whether you are explaining because you are anxious or to provide information to support your refusal.

- You may be overestimating the difficulty the complainant will have in accepting your refusal. Very often if you express your feelings openly and honestly you allow other people to express themselves.
- If you said 'yes' but wanted to say 'no', it can show. Headaches, grimaces and muscle tension can all result from the stress caused by being over compliant.
- Acknowledge your feelings. A simple statement like 'I find this difficult' allows you to express your feelings honestly.
- If the complainant is having difficulty accepting your 'no', use the broken-record technique. Repeat your assertive refusal, couched in slightly different ways, each time the other person tries to persuade or evade you.

Setting limits

- If you are uncertain about how to respond to a request, saying 'let me get back to you' will give you time to consider whether:
 - the request is within the school's policy and priorities, and Departmental values
 - school personnel have the time and resources to accomplish what is being asked
 - the request risks the safety and wellbeing of staff or compromises their duty of care to students
 - the complainant can get help from a more appropriate source. For example the principal, regional office or central office

How to make saying 'no' easier

- Keep your reply short.
- Give a reason for refusing the request.
- Avoid 'I can't ...' phrases which sound like excuses.
- If you genuinely need it, ask for more time to decide on the request.
- Don't be abrupt in your refusal.
- Lead up to the 'no' with a preliminary statement such as, 'This may be difficult for you ...'.
- Explain the facts and the rationale for the decision.
- Provide an alternative course of action if possible.
- Allow the complainant to have some control, such as in the way the decision is announced or timed.
- Ask for immediate feedback about your refusal.
- Be prepared to listen to defending complaints.
- Offer soothing words such as, 'I know this seems harsh or sudden to you.'
- Suggest another meeting if necessary after the person has had time to digest the refusal.

When you have to say 'yes'

- Tell the complainant you can agree to their request this time, and ask how the two of you might plan things better if there was a next time.
- Tell them 'yes' and set limits about when you can reasonably deliver.
- Put a condition on your agreement. For example, 'I can talk to you for an hour at two o'clock, but I have a class scheduled at three o'clock.'