

Transcript: How to say 'no' more easily

Hello! So I wonder how easy it is for you to say 'no'? If you find that you get defensive sometimes or that you're justifying yourself, I hope that this will offer some ideas and inspiration. It's been around as a subject for me a lot in the last few weeks. I've got one friend who is finding it hard to say no to unpaid work. I've got another one who is struggling to explain to friends why he's not ready to meet up after being unwell. And it's reminded me of a very delightful conversation with a dear friend that has stayed with me for more than a decade.

At that time I had had a serious run-in with depression. I had come out of hospital and she and I were talking about where we could go to get a break. She suggested that we might go north and stay with a mutual friend.

Now for me, staying at someone else's house can be challenging. I don't really know to this day what the components of that are but I do know that when I'm a bit wobbly for one reason or another I can feel small and less emotionally secure than if I'm in a neutral space like a bnb or wherever it is.

At the time I had some pretty harsh judgments for myself along the lines of you know 'I'm so unreasonable. This is just weird! Most people love staying with other people' 'I'm so selfish. It would save my friend money and she's going out of her way to take me away when I'm still not 100%. I went on to try and justify myself to my friend and after a few minutes she stopped me and said the thing that's stuck.

She said, 'Alice you don't need to explain yourself to me or to anyone. If staying with someone else isn't possible for you right now then that is enough for me.' What I realized in that moment was that my difficulty and my struggle to justify myself had nothing to do with what she thought about my 'no'. Rather it was all to do with me not really believing that it was okay for me to have a 'no' to this.

Apart from the fact that it was a delightful conversation, the other reason this conversation has stayed with me I think is because it gave me a very sharp change, not like the usual days or weeks that it can take, or longer - years in some cases to make changes. It happened pretty immediately.

And it happened as I applied my friend's compassion and understanding to myself. So I received myself by saying something like, 'you know most people love to stay with other people but I don't and that's really okay' and something you know about 'depression is serious and it's really okay to do what I need to do in order to keep well'.

Once I'd done that then I could communicate about this particular 'no' with clarity and compassion and that's been the case to this day when I've needed to put that loving boundary in place to take care of myself.

In the situation with my friend it might have looked something like 'You know, I won't be able to stay with a friend because slightly bizarrely it's a real trigger for me and I wonder how you feel about that and about money in particular?' and then going on with conversation 'and I wonder what could work for us both instead'. So there's clarity there in my own 'no' which isn't any longer at the mercy of my sense that it's not okay. And the compassion comes because when I'm caught up in justifying myself, I really don't have my focus on my friend.

When I feel okay with my own 'no' my focus can switch to the impact on the other person because I'm not caught up in that sense of guilt and justification any more. But rather my focus is on a solution that might work well for the both of us. I hope something here has been of help to you.