



Saying No to Support our Yeses

It is an exceptional time during which we are engaging in social solidarity by practicing social distancing — literally maintaining physical boundaries, with, **and for**, one another. During this COVID-19 disruption to life as we have known it, our normal routines and practices are likely not feasible and may well also be detrimental.

These physical boundaries protect our health and support the well-being of those we care about. In much the same way, setting and maintaining social and psychological boundaries protects our mental health and relationships.

Our development and maintenance of boundaries is a foundation for acting with compassion. As Brené Brown says, *"Compassionate people ask for what they need. They say no when they need to, and when they say yes, they mean it. They're compassionate because their boundaries keep them out of resentment."* As this statement implies,

there are several things to which we want to say 'yes' to in our lives; particularly, those things that are in accordance with our values, goals and needs. We often need to say "no" to support our "yeses" and keep ourselves out of resentment and fatigue.

To identify where we need to set boundaries to maintain our wellbeing amidst our new normal, consider the following prompt, along with 3 examples. Notice how each begins with a "yes!"

COVID-19: Compassion in Action

Key: Value/Yes – italics

Boundary/No – non italics

1. *To maintain my family's health*, I may ask family and friends to restrict their visits to me and my children;
2. *While transitioning to work effectively from home*, I may ask for time and space during which to conduct my work;
3. *To limit my anxiety and protect my wellbeing*, I may ask people to limit their discussion of the news with me.

Once we are mindful of our goals and values, we can define what is helpful and acceptable behavior from others to best support us. To do so from a place of compassion and grace, here are 6 tips for setting and maintaining compassionate boundaries.



1. **Know what you want to say “Yes” to in your life:** As the first example above indicates, you may want to protect your family and abide by social distancing recommendations.
2. **Be proactive. Have “meetings” to discuss boundaries:** Once you have decided to self-isolate with your family, you might let family and friends know of your decision and cancel any appointments, play dates and events you had planned.
3. **Just say it! Use simple and direct language:** *“With the current state of the COVID-19, I’m no longer allowing visitors or going out to interact with other people.”*
4. **Reinforce by pointing out violations IN THE MOMENT:** If someone is insistent that you are overly cautious, reassert your position, saying something like, *“Even though we have different opinions on this, I am asking you to respect my wish in this situation.”*
5. **Give explanations that are specific, relevant to the other person, and offer shared solutions:** Here, you might suggest rescheduling later or meeting via video conference instead of face-to-face.
6. **Back up your boundary with action. If you give in, you invite people to ignore your needs.**

We all have uniquely nuanced values, goals and needs. COVID-19 brings new needs to light and setting boundaries during this time will help us face this situation with more enjoyment and authenticity, as well as facilitate our productivity, health, and ability to maintain healthy relationships with one another.