

The art of saying 'no'

flaring endeavour antsy overdue notice

Will you babysit Johnny (your toddler nephew) tonight?

People tend to ask for things because a pattern has built up. There's a part of us that goes, 'I've done this loads of times, without complaint. We get understandably 1)_____ about what their reaction will be if we say 'no'. And there probably will be a reaction, whether that's making a face, or a full-blown conflict. That's not about the 'no' being wrong – it's about the dynamic. Actually, your 'no' was 2)_____. If you're worried about the situation 3)_____ up, you can try the staggered "no": I can do it this time, but next time I need more 4)_____.

Would you like to donate to the anticancer/animal abandonment/ poverty alleviation fund?

It's such a piteous feature of modern life, the chugger (someone who stands on the street and asks people to give money to a charity): they're having to act incredibly cheerful around people who just want to be left alone; you feel their humiliation, and yet at the same time, can't afford to take out every possible charitable subscription. Go with, "Thanks, but I already donate to X," to validate their cause and therefore their 5)_____. They know you may be lying, but they also know why, so the exchange ends up being quite pleasant, though obviously it would be more pleasant for them if I'd just give them your bank details.