

The art of saying 'no'

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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) _____.

Can you lend me some money?

If you have it, and this is a one-off that will 5) _____ off catastrophe, do it. But if this is part of your relationship, that they're always asking for money, never pay it back and think you're made of gold, at some point you'll have to say "no". Do it with compassion – this situation, in which you are the money bags, was co-created, half by you. Beware the 6) _____. You'll probably have to say "no" more than once for it to stick. Ask yourself whether what you usually do actually helping. Are you blocking that person from figuring out something for themselves? We can be sensitive to what someone's going through without 7) _____ them of their responsibilities.

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 8) _____. 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.

