



no



no



NO



no no
no



yes

Just Say No

How to break your yes habit. **BY CAROLINE TIGER**

IF YOU SAY YES to every request, you're not alone. Susan Newman, Ph.D., a social psychologist in Metuchen, New Jersey, realized she was a yes woman when she found herself editing a manuscript as a favor for a friend of a friend—whose name she didn't even know. She resolved to change her ways and began writing a book of her own, *The Book of No: 250 Ways to Say It—and Mean It and Stop People-Pleasing Forever*. In her research, she found a common thread. "Women are afraid they won't be liked—that they'll be viewed as lazy and uncaring if they refuse a request," says Newman. Yet the more we say yes just to please people, the more overloaded and resentful we become. It might take some practice at first, but saying no is easy—and such a relief!—when you use the right words. Some advice for tricky situations:

THE TRAP A friend invites you to her Super Bowl party. When you ask if you can bring anything, she says, "Great! I need dessert for 16."

AVOID IT Never make an open-ended offer. "Always expect to be asked to do the worst thing possible," says self-help guru Laurie Puhn, author of *Instant Persuasion*. Instead, offer a choice between two specific items, such as a cake and a bottle of wine. Or don't ask at all and simply show up with something. "That's just as gracious," says Puhn.

THE TRAP A coworker asks you to pitch in for a group gift for someone you don't know or don't like.

AVOID IT You don't want to be rude, of course—but don't be vague in your refusal, either. "People often take a wishy-washy response as a 'yes' and keep

coming back at you until they wear you down," says Newman. Rather, give a more specific reason, such as, "I don't know Janet that well, and I don't feel comfortable having my name on the gift card." Or simply, "I'm really strapped at the moment." It's a mistake to start out with, "I'd really like to, but..." unless you mean it, because this offers a point of entry for a persistent collector.

THE TRAP Your child's school asks you to be a chaperone on an overnight trip.

AVOID IT "Never, ever say yes to something like this without asking for time to consider it first and talking it over with your family," says Puhn. Resist your yes reflex and say: "I'm flattered that you asked, but I need to think about it. Let me get back to you tomorrow."

THE TRAP Your mother-in-law keeps popping in for surprise visits, expecting to be entertained.

AVOID IT A good offense is your best defense. If you're approaching a busy time, ask your husband to speak up confidently in advance, advises Puhn. The right words: "We love having you over, but we're incredibly busy this time of year, so please let us know when you're planning to come. And understand that sometimes we'll have to take a rain check." Laying the groundwork for a polite refusal makes it easier to say no later on.

THE TRAP A cookie-pushing child is on your doorstep.

GIVE IN Oh, bugger! Just say yes. □

Caroline Tiger is the author of *How to Behave*.