

## **SETTING LIMITS: HOW TO SAY YES TO YOURSELF AND NO TO OTHERS**

Read any magazine article or book about parenting and the author will advise the necessity of setting limits for children. “Set limits and stick to them,” parents are counseled. Limits create the structure and discipline that every child needs for healthy upbringing.

But for adults—especially those who tend to view other people’s needs and wants as more important than their own—setting limits is more than an exercise in discipline; it’s a vital component in good self-care.

Consider Georgia. Her calendar is filled with one family event after another. A niece’s graduation followed by a great-uncle’s 75th birthday party followed by a tea her mother planned for an old family friend. Much as she loves her family, enough is enough. After a day at work and meeting her immediate family’s needs, she has hardly any time left for herself.

Or Burke whose boss scarcely gives him time to complete one project before he lays on another. Then another. Work is so backlogged Burke stays at the office every night till past nine and goes in on weekends as well.

Stephanie’s husband helped her build a studio for her photography in the garage then stored his fishing gear willy-nilly in whatever cabinet or cupboard he wanted.

By not setting limits, Georgia, Burke and Stephanie are letting the needs and wants of others to come before their own well-being.

Sometimes it’s difficult to learn to care for ourselves as much as we care for others. Especially if we feel uncomfortable or guilty saying “no.” We may fear losing someone or something if we set limits on how much time we can give or work we can handle or if we claim space for ourselves. But always giving in to the requests or demands of others is plowing a field where resentments take seed. And failing to assert our needs and wants or to stand up for ourselves is disregarding our physical, emotional and spiritual well-being.

Far from being selfish and mean, setting limits is a healthy act of self-respect.

Taking a firm stand might be difficult at first. But by being calm, clear and direct—and without intentionally stepping on anybody’s toes—you can learn how to set limits and create the kind of balance in your life that honors your own needs and wants.

For Georgia, it meant coming up with compromises—she’d attend the great-uncle’s birthday party but drew the line at the niece’s graduation and her mother’s tea. Burke had to explain to his boss that it was impossible to do the kind of job the boss expected if he wasn’t allowed ample time to complete a project. Stephanie offered to help build additional storage space in the garage for her husband’s fishing equipment.

In each of these scenarios, far from losing something or someone they valued, by setting limits Georgia, Burke and Stephanie got what they wanted or needed, took good care of themselves and in the process gained a healthy amount of self-respect.

