

Case Study: I am just a Girl who Needs to Learn to say "NO"

Sue has been working in the emergency department in a large urban hospital over the past 6 months. This is her first position as a nurse. She has adjusted well, and she likes the fast pace of the department and working with a team that makes crucial decisions that affect the lives of patients. Sue is well liked by her peers; they enjoy her fresh, enthusiastic energy and her desire to jump in and help, whether or not she is asked. However, Sue has begun to notice that her peers always turn to her first for requests for extra help; she is beginning to feel resentful.

She wonders why she is usually the 'chosen one' to help when others are also available to help out. When she contemplates addressing this problem, she comes up short, not knowing what to do; the alternatives don't feel acceptable to her; they include feelings of guilt and a perception that she is selfish if she doesn't automatically agree to respond to her colleague's requests for help.

A step-by-step plan to change Sue's behavior:

1. It is time to think about self-preservation:

Sue needs to reflect on the concept of self-preservation as a nurse. Reflecting on the components of self-care will help Sue in her preservation as a nurse. This type of reflection can help Sue look at this issue in a broader context as she begins to truly consider her own needs as well as the needs of her team members.

2. The issue of guilt:

- How will Sue feel in 6 months or year from now, if she doesn't set limits?
- What will happen if Sue continues to do everything that she is asked to do, without setting any limits?
- Sue needs to imagine how she will feel in 6 months or perhaps a year from now. Her insights can help her move to a plan of action.
- Sue's plan of action such focus on what she is comfortable doing.
- If she sets her sights too high, she raises the risk of being unsuccessful. Sue may also benefit from discussing her concerns with trusted colleagues to get their input.

3. Cultural issues:

Sue is from a culture where women's role is subordinate to men, and saying no is a sign of disrespect; taking these factors into consideration means that making the shift to a new behavior may take a while to materialize. That doesn't mean that she should abandon a plan to change her behavior, it just means that she may need more time and support to take the initial steps.

4. The plan:

Sue needs to create a plan that isn't overly ambitious in order to be successful. A plan that works: A plan that works includes incremental (small) steps to support successful change over time. Since Sue wants to be able to implement boundaries,

she needs to identify situations where implementing boundaries will not present an insurmountable challenge.

5. Practice situations:

To initiate a new behavior, it usually takes some practice. The plan needs to be easy to follow: An example of a plan that may be easy to follow is, "Let me get back to you in a few minutes", following a request from a colleague in a non-emergency situation. That response allows Sue to stop and think, rather than automatically say yes to all requests.

6. Breaking a pattern:

Interrupting demystifies trying on a new behavior; in the case of Sue, it means not automatically saying yes to every team member's request. Once a pattern has been interrupted without serious consequences, a greater likelihood will be sustained.

Overtime, Sue can begin to evaluate if she has been successful in developing a more flexible approach to responding to her colleague's requests; first, she can assess if her stress level has diminished as a result of shifting her behavior. If her stress level has diminished and if her resentment towards her colleagues is no longer an issue, she can use this experience as a framework for making other changes when necessary.

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