

Refusal Skills

EHC Medical Patient Education Module

No thanks...

You may not think you need any practice in how to say no, but the truth is - you probably do.

About a third of substance abusers relapse after treatment as a direct result of social pressure from a friend or family member.¹

Think of all the people you drank or used with over the past while. You can try to limit your social contact with anyone who triggers cravings, but the odds are good that you'll run into people you used to hang with every now and again. Some of these people are going to ask you to drink or use with them...and when they do:

1. You're probably going to be very tempted to say yes
2. A big part of you may want to say yes
3. A split second of weakness or indecision - or an unconvincing refusal - can open the door to relapse

Getting addiction treatment is sort of like buying yourself a toolbox and filling it with the tools you'll need to overcome the lasting brain changes of addiction. One of these tools – one that is taught in most addiction treatment programs – is learning to refuse drugs or alcohol when they're offered.

Learning Drug Refusal Skills

1. OK, so you're serious about quitting drugs or alcohol.
2. You know that you are going to run into people you used to drink or use with and that you will be offered drugs or alcohol, and in some cases you may even feel strong pressure to use or drink.
3. You should also realize that in such situations, you'll probably also experience strong cravings to use and that a momentary lapse in resolve will result in relapse

Therefore - since you *know* what's coming and since you know that social pressures will challenge your resolve to stay abstinent, you need to get prepared now for what threatens your recovery tomorrow.

How to Say No Like You Mean It

You need to learn to firmly turn down drug or alcohol in a way that closes the door to further discussion about the subject.

It's hard enough to say no once when you're tempted – get into a long discussion about the subject and you may well stretch your resolve past the breaking point.

How to Refuse Drugs or Alcohol

- Say no politely but use a strong and assertive tone of voice.
- While saying no, maintain good eye contact and an upright body posture. You want to make sure the person understands that you are serious and that you mean what you say. Your body language communicates even more than your words in this situation.
- Say no in a way that discourages future offers. Do not make an excuse for your refusal. If you say you can't drink right now because you have to get up early time then you've done nothing to dissuade that person from offering you alcohol again the next time she sees you. You are much better off saying something like, "I do not smoke weed anymore so I'd appreciate it if you would not offer it to me again in the future." or "for health reasons I have given up drinking for good."
- After you say no, suggest another type of activity instead of drug or alcohol use ("I don't do coke anymore, but there's a movie I want to see playing – do you want to go catch it?")
- Or, after you say no, change the subject of the conversation to anything other than using drugs or alcohol.
- If the person continues to try to convince you to do drugs or to drink, you need to get out of the situation or make it clear to them that you are not OK with continual offers. For example, "I like hanging out with you but if you are not going to respect that I don't drink anymore I won't be able to hang out with you anymore and I'll have to ask you to leave my house."