The day after his biology midterm, Marvin is approached by Mindi, who is scheduled to take the same test the next day. Mindi is very attractive and popular, and Marvin has a crush on her. Mindi asks him how he did on the test and then proceeds to question him on its content. She adds, somewhat apologetically, that she was out dancing all night and just hasn't had time to study. She would be ever so grateful if Marvin would help her. Marvin is thrilled and flattered that his dream girl has turned to him for help. But he's also feeling a little used. He studied hard for the exam; he didn't go out partying the night before. Plus, helping Mindi might jeopardize his own grade since the professor scores on a curve. He really doesn't want to help her but he's afraid she won't like him if he refuses.

Marvin has a problem. It's not an uncommon problem. How many times have you said "Yes" when you really wanted to say "No"? Why do you do it?

➔ *Does it make you feel guilty if you say "No"?*

➔ *Do you feel you're a "bad person" if you say "No"?*

➔ *Do you feel flattered but worry you won't be liked or asked again if you say "No" in this particular situation?*

Let's face it, it's easy to say "Yes" when you mean "No," even though you may regret the consequences and hate yourself for being a pushover. However, there is a way to deal with the kind of problem Marvin is having. He could learn how to be assertive.

Assertiveness is not aggressiveness or hostility. It doesn't involve deliberately hurting or belittling others. It involves accepting the fact that you have the right to say "No," even though you may have been taught to always be accommodating. You have to try to be honest with yourself about why you say "Yes" instead of "No." The easiest way to learn to be more assertive is to start off being assertive in low risk situations. Once you discover that it's not fatal to say "No," you can build up self-confidence to apply to more challenging situations.

Let's get back to Marvin and Mindi. Suppose Marvin replied, "If you stopped worrying only about your looks and your popularity all the time and tried opening a book once in a while, maybe you wouldn't have to ask for help to pass a test. Forget it; I'm not helping you!" That's not being assertive; that's a hostile attack. An assertive response might be, "I don't want to hurt my grade on this test so I won't tell you the questions. However, if you need help studying for the next test, let me know. I'd love to help."

It is possible to say "No" and do it in an assertive, not aggressive way. Standing your ground is not something to feel guilty about. Assertiveness improves self-esteem and gains respect from others. That way you stand a better chance of being liked for who you are, rather than for the favors you do.

Assertiveness