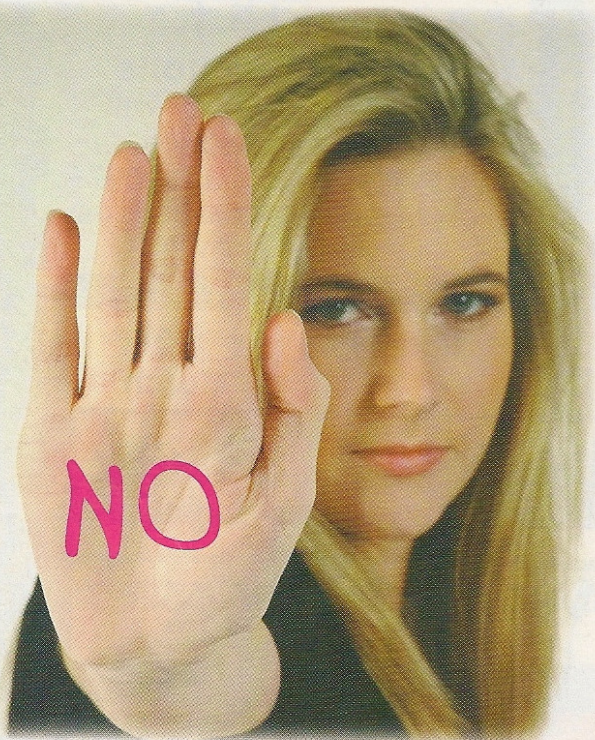


Guilt and the Balancing Act



by Susan Havens

It's Friday early afternoon. I'm stuck in a blank stare—melancholy, guilt-ridden and sick to my stomach. I just let my friends down. I bailed on four (married)

It's called boundaries

girlfriends who've been planning to get together for weeks. (Initially I said yes, purely out of guilt.) But instead of making up a story, which I really wanted to do, I told them the simple truth. I just didn't feel like going. And while I chose not to share my every reason with them, I did share my heart hoping for some level of compassion or understanding. Period. End of story. (Well, not really.)

You see, I know my limits, not only financially, but also emotionally, mentally and physically.

(Those last three have perhaps the biggest impact on my daughter because when I don't get my eight hours of sleep, let's just say I'm not a fun mommy—and nothing gets done.) Still, I find it hard to say no.

Nearly every minute of every day I feel like I'm shortchanging something in my

life—for the sake of this column, I will share my reasons with you, reasons I believe will certainly ring true for most single moms: not only am I worn-out, I want to see my daughter after her long day in preschool and I don't want to pick her up and immediately put her with a sitter. Moreover, the cost of a sitter on top of eating out isn't exactly cheap. Finally, it is just me; when the sun comes up so does my daughter and that means me too. (And there are no free naps on Saturday; if I want one—you got it!—I have to pay for a sitter or gently persuade a friend to step in.)

Do they truly understand?

I think like most things, it's hard to really "get it," unless you've been there. And single motherhood, especially without the help of a father, is absolutely challenging.

life—from my daughter to my job to my health and in this case, my friends.

It's a constant struggle trying to give 100 percent in every area of my life. What I've finally come to realize is that not only is it not possible, I don't owe anyone a reason or excuse. And I shouldn't feel guilty doing what I need to do for myself and for my daughter. It's called boundaries—personal property lines that define who you are and who you are not and that influence all areas of your life. As Drs. Henry Cloud and John Townsend explain in their best-selling book "Boundaries," they are physical, they are mental, they are spiritual and they are emotional. And most importantly, healthy boundaries are necessary to take control of your life.

Easier said than done. Like most women, I want to please everyone and do everything perfectly.

That leads me to the common boundary myths as shared by Drs. Cloud and Townsend in their book:

- 1) If I set boundaries I'm being selfish.
- 2) Boundaries are a sign of disobedience.
- 3) If I set boundaries I will be hurt by others.
- 4) If I set boundaries I will hurt others.
- 5) Boundaries mean that I am angry.
- 6) When others set boundaries it injures me.
- 7) Boundaries cause feelings of guilt.