

How to Identify Your Non-Negotiables in Life

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Co-authored by Klare Heston, LCSW  and 6 contributors

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Non-negotiables are those beliefs in your life that you would never go against. Having this set of values allows you to live the best life you can, and one that you are proud of. Deciding what these are may be intimidating, but when you talk with others, write them down, and enforce them, you can figure out your non-negotiables and start living your life accordingly.

Part
1

Part 1 of 3: Talking With Others



1 Ask someone you trust about their personal values and beliefs. Sometimes it's easy to realize what your own non-negotiables are when you ask someone close to you what theirs are. When you hear what someone has to say, it may help you to acknowledge that you have the same, or different, beliefs. Ask someone you know and trust, as they will likely be the most helpful in this situation.

- To get your friend to open up to you, you could say, "I've been trying to figure out what my beliefs are in life, and I was wondering if you felt comfortable enough to tell me what yours are? I really respect you and value what you have to say. I think listening to you could help me determine what mine are."^[1]



2 Get someone else's opinion. Do you know someone who probably knows you better than you know yourself? Is there someone in your life whose opinion you value more than anyone's? If so, ask them what they think your non-negotiables are. Chances are, they will be right.

- For example, you could say, "I'm having a difficult time determining what my personal values and beliefs are. You know, the things that I feel strongly about? If you had to guess, what would you say mine are?" Then you can think about what they said and determine if they are correct.



3 Discuss it with your partner. When you're trying to determine your non-negotiables as a couple or a family, it's important to figure them out with your partner. Talk to each other about what you believe these principles should be. Hopefully you can get on the same page.

- For instance, some of your family or couple non-negotiables could be to spend time with each other on a certain day every week: no exceptions. It could also be that you eat together at the dinner table every night, or that at a certain time every night your phones and other electronic devices are turned off.^[2]
- Or, you might add to the list that you will never tolerate abuse from a friend or significant other. You might decide to add this based on personal experience or after watching a friend in an abusive situation.

Part 2 of 3: Writing Your Non-Negotiables Down



1 Distinguish beliefs from non-negotiables. When coming up with your non-negotiables, you may identify a variety of items you feel strongly about. However, there is a difference between what you feel strongly about and what really are non-negotiables. You may agree to do something you feel strongly against because of other factors. A non-negotiable is something you would never change your mind about, no matter what.

- For example, a commonly controversial belief is believing a woman should not be able to choose to terminate a pregnancy. However, there may be some cases where this belief is flexible, like when the pregnancy is the result of sexual assault.
- Make a tentative list. Give it a few days and then go back and look at it again. You may feel differently about what you really think are non-negotiables after you've had a few days to think about it. Ask yourself if you would ever go against a non-negotiable in a certain situation. If you would, it's probably something you simply feel strongly about.[3]



2 Make a firm list. There's something about putting words into writing that makes them seem very official. Putting pen to paper and writing down your non-negotiables can really help you to enforce them for yourself. You may even want to add your signature to the end like a contract to yourself to stand behind these principles.^[4]

- Place the list in a prominent place in your home or keep it in your wallet. Look at the list every day. Having it near you at all times can keep them in the forefront of your mind and help you keep them.



3 Revise your list often. Life changes, and so can your non-negotiables. A few times a year, revisit your list and decide if what is there is still true. It's perfectly acceptable to add and remove items from your list. Keeping your list current is ideal, particularly if referring to it helps you stay strong in your convictions.

- For example, you may have needed to work on weekends early in your career, but as you become more efficient you may change your non-negotiables to not working on weekends. Similarly, exercising three days a week may have been acceptable before, but now you may want to five to six times a week.^[5]

Part 3 of 3: Enforcing Your Non-Negotiables



1 Learn to say “no.” One of the major reasons why people give in to their non-negotiables is that they are afraid to say “no.” Perhaps they don’t want to hurt someone’s feelings or they just don’t have the confidence to say “no.” Whatever the reason, they hurt themselves when they give in. Learning to say “no” helps you stay true to yourself and your beliefs.

- When someone asks you to compromise your non-negotiables, you can simply say to them, “I hope you understand, but my answer has to be no. I don’t mean to hurt your feelings and I’m sorry if I did.” You can then explain why, if you feel comfortable doing so.^[6]
- For example, your best friend may ask you if she can look over your shoulder during a test because she has been upset about a breakup and couldn’t study. However, if you have a non-negotiable about cheating or lying, then you can say no and cite this reason.



2 Let people know what your non-negotiables are. Whether it is work or relationship-related, it's important to lay your non-negotiables out on the table. Putting them out there before someone has the chance to challenge them is a good way to help you enforce them. If someone knows what your non-negotiables are, they may be less likely to ask you to violate them.

- If you and your partner are getting serious, you could say, "Before we proceed with this relationship, I just want you to know what I consider to be my non-negotiables." When you are starting a new job, you could say to your boss, "I'm excited to work with you, but there are a few things that I cannot do, such as work past 7 pm."
- Letting them know your non-negotiables could prevent you from investing too much into the relationships if the person isn't willing to accept them.[7]



3 Avoid people who can't respect them. You may find that, no matter what, some people simply can't resist trying to challenge you. If you worry you'll bend because of this, simply stay away from those people, if you are able to. Allowing them to consistently tempt you may result in you doing something you regret.

- For instance, if you have a friend that wants you to drink alcohol, even though you abstaining from it is a non-negotiable, don't go out into that type of setting with them. If your partner is adamant about having kids and you don't want them, perhaps you should end the relationship.
- Staying true to yourself is difficult, and having people around you who don't support your beliefs can threaten your well-being.[8]



4 Never give in. It's often easier to give into your non-negotiables than to stand strong for them. However, giving in—even one time—gives others the impression that they aren't actually non-negotiables. This may make them believe they can tempt you again, which may make you fold.

- Compromising on non-negotiables will eventually catch up with a relationship, and it will be much more painful to resolve these issues later on, or this may also lead to a more painful breakup. Learn to listen to your gut and your heart.

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About This Article



Co-authored by:
Klare Heston, LCSW
Licensed Social Worker

This article was co-authored by **Klare Heston, LCSW**. Klare Heston is a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker based in Cleveland, Ohio. With experience in academic counseling and clinical supervision, Klare received her Master of Social Work from the Virginia Commonwealth University in 1983. She also holds a 2-Year Post-Graduate Certificate from the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland, as well as certification in Family Therapy, Supervision, Mediation, and Trauma Recovery and Treatment (EMDR). This article has been viewed 26,338 times.

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