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HE'S A BIT WHIFFY!

Instead of avoiding the person or dropping hints, ask yourself, "If I had a body odour problem how would I like someone to speak to me about it?"

Straight-talking tip

Set the tone for the conversation and find the words to express the problem. You can say, "Let's sit in my office. There's something I need to talk to you about. It's a personal issue and, honestly, I'm not sure how to put it." Approach it gently: "I can't help noticing your body odour. I have a sense others might also have noticed."

Invite the person to propose a solution – maybe they're on medication or they don't have proper bathing facilities. "What do you think is the best solution?"

Acknowledge the change in what they have done as soon as possible.



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Approach it gently: "I can't help noticing your body odour"

BETTER CONVERSATIONS WITH RELATIVES

Negotiating with family members who overstay their welcome

Setting boundaries before any family member settles into your home is vital in maintaining good relationships.

Straight-talking tip

Confront the relative with the length of their stay as soon as you become aware of your immediate family having a problem.

Open the conversation with a direct question: "What's the story with your travel plans/house that's being built?"

Share responsibility for the problem by admitting you should have discussed the length of their stay at the start. Perhaps you could say, "My little one moved in with the older one to make room for you but now they're getting on each other's nerves due to the lack of space. Is there any other plan we can make?"

Let the person own the problem and offer to make alternative plans.

Ensure there's a follow-up to the conversation by asking them to let you know what they'll be doing so you can tell your family.

Be direct and honest: "We have a bit of a problem"

CONFRONTING A NOISY NEIGHBOUR

Whether the problem is loud music and parties that go on until the early hours of the morning or the revving of a car or motor-bike, this problem is best tackled as soon as you become aware of it.

Straight-talking tip

Think of the outcome you want from the conversation. You don't want to alienate your neighbour but need to be firm about putting a stop to the noise.

Draw attention to the din by saying something like, "I'm sure you're aware of the noise from your party last night/your car/your dog barking."

Don't be deflected by them asking you for a solution. You can make a suggestion but let your neighbour come up with a way to solve the problem. Hopefully they will say something like, "Maybe we can end the party by 11 pm." That way you get a commitment from them.

Explain how you feel about the situation. "It's not reasonable as it kept me awake"

THE ART OF SAYING NO

To friends or family members who want to borrow money/your car/clothes

Your sister wants to borrow some new clothes you bought; you get up at 5 am to finish a presentation a colleague has asked you to help with or you go the long way around to school because you promised a lift to a child whose mother was away and then got stuck in traffic on the way to work.

Often you say yes when you mean no because you fear others will criticise you for being selfish or uncaring. Or you hold on to the illusion you can be there for everyone. Being able to say no is an important skill. You need to keep yourself in a good space and give yourself more time to pursue what's important to you.

Straight-talking tip

The way you say it matters. Use the acronym CARE to plan the conversation in which you say no.

Clear – start by finding out exactly what the person wants from you. Get details of what, when, who, why and how much.

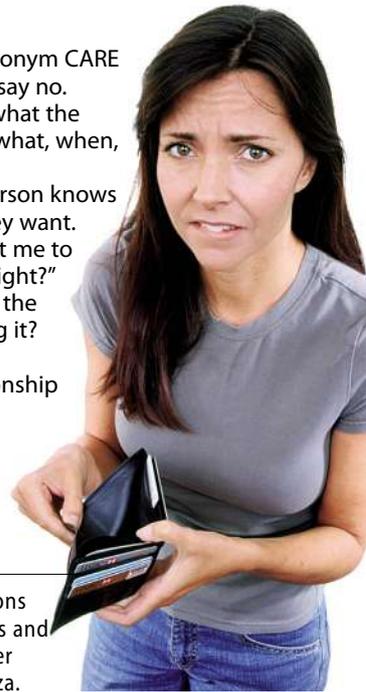
Acknowledge the request so the person knows you've heard and understand what they want. You might say, "Let me check: you want me to . . ." or "You're asking if I can . . . Is that right?"

Recognise your needs. Do you have the time to do this? Would you enjoy doing it?

Effect – If you say no will this have a negative effect on an important relationship or your career?

Saying no: Be brief. Be honest. Don't apologise or explain unnecessarily. Simply allow the person to see you've made your decision thoughtfully and carefully.

Straight Talk: How to Manage Conversations that Scare You is published by Zebra Press and costs R150. For more tips for having better conversations visit www.straight-talk.co.za.



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