DO THERAPY | FROM REACTION TO CHOICE

When Pressure, Expectations, or Requests Trigger Resistance

THE PRACTICE: Notice when a request, reminder, expectation, or obligation triggers an automatic response. Slow down, identify what's happening, and practice making a choice rather than simply reacting.

Sometimes we say yes to avoid conflict. Sometimes we say no to reclaim control. Sometimes we resist something we actually want because someone else suggested it.

This exercise is about building more flexibility not becoming more agreeable or abandoning your boundaries.

1 | NOTICE

Catch the Moment

Think about a recent situation where you experienced pressure, resistance, defensiveness, or an urge to withdraw.

What happened?

- Someone asked, suggested, reminded, expected, or encouraged me to:

What was my immediate reaction?

☐ I wanted to say no
☐ I became defensive
☐ I felt criticized or controlled
☐ I agreed even though I didn't want to
☐ I delayed, avoided, or withdrew
☐ I felt resentment or frustration
☐ Something else: _____

What felt threatened?

☐ Autonomy — My freedom to choose
☐ Competence — My sense of capability
☐ Identity — My sense of self
☐ Fairness — My sense of reciprocity
☐ Connection — My need to matter
☐ Capacity — My available time, energy, or resources

What was I telling myself?

2 | REVIEW THE GAME TAPE

Understand the Reaction

Revisit the moment with curiosity rather than judgment.

What was actually asked of me?

What did I make the request mean?

For example: "They don't trust me." "I'm being controlled." "Nothing I do is enough." "I'm always responsible."

What was driving my response?

☐ Protecting a legitimate boundary
☐ Wanting to reclaim control
☐ Avoiding discomfort or possible failure
☐ Feeling overwhelmed or lacking capacity
☐ Feeling criticized, dismissed, or inadequate
☐ Wanting acknowledgment, fairness, or connection
☐ Reacting to an old or familiar pattern

What did my response accomplish in the moment?

What did it cost me, the other person, or the relationship?

THE AUTONOMY CHECK

Ask yourself:

- *If nobody had asked me to do this, would I still want to do it?*
- *If I didn't need to prove my independence, what would I choose?*
- *Am I responding to the request itself, or to how it makes me feel?*

3 | PRACTICE

Make a Choice Instead of a Reaction

Choose one situation where you can practice responding differently.

My usual response:

What I actually want or value in this situation:

What I can realistically choose or influence:

Now consider three possibilities:

- **YES:** I can agree because it aligns with my values, priorities, or commitments.
- **NO:** I can decline because it conflicts with a legitimate boundary, need, or limitation.
- **NEGOTIATE:** I can consider another person's perspective while communicating my own needs, preferences, or capacity.

My intentional response will be:

LANGUAGE TO TRY

- "Let me think about what you're asking."
- "I notice I'm getting defensive. I want to understand why."
- "I was planning to do that, and I think the reminder made me feel pressured."
- "I understand why this matters to you. Here's what I can realistically do."
- "I agree this needs to happen. Can we discuss how and when?"
- "I want to help, but I need to approach this differently."
- "I don't agree, but I want to understand your perspective."

Choose one statement or create your own:

4 | BUILD REPS

Practice Something Different

For the next week, look for three opportunities to notice an automatic reaction to a request, expectation, or obligation.

Situation My automatic reaction What I chose instead

1.

2.

3.

After each opportunity, consider:

- Did I pause before responding?
- Did I identify what was getting activated?
- Did I act from intention rather than pressure?
- Did I communicate my choice clearly?
- What happened when I responded differently?

You don't need to change every response. Sometimes your original answer will still be the right one.

The practice is learning to make that response more deliberately.

TEST & LEARN

What Did You Discover?

What did I notice about when I experience pressure or resistance?

What helped me respond with more flexibility?

What might I try differently next time?

ONE THING TO KEEP PRACTICING:

REMEMBER

You don't have to automatically agree.

You don't have to automatically resist.

You can pause, consider, and choose.

The goal isn't compliance. It's ownership.

Notice → Review the Game Tape → Practice → Build Reps → Test & Learn