



Episode 193: How Do You Say No When Someone Might Die

Quick Dip Episode

Having boundaries is essential to maintaining our mental health as medical professionals. Generally, we want to enforce our boundaries, but sometimes, we can afford to bend — or even break — some of these boundaries in certain conditions. Depending on the consequences, even some of our most firm boundaries might flex.

But the important thing to do is to define what those boundaries are, and what circumstances might necessitate flexing or breaking a boundary. Some boundaries we might never allow anyone to step over, while others might not be so hard. However, without clearly defining these boundaries, we can get muddled about what we should and shouldn't flex.

If you're looking to have a healthier career and balance extending yourself against self-care, this episode is for you.

Podcast Links

Check out our [Permission to Thrive CPD membership](#) for doctors!

Find out more about the [Shapes Toolkit Training programme](#)

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Quote to remember:

‘When we ask the question, “How do I say no, when someone might die?” I say to people, “We’re just asking the wrong question.”’

What You Will Learn

Many medical professionals overextend themselves by constantly agreeing to help others. Usually, they think they do this because the consequences might be patient harm. In truth, it's just because they fear inconveniencing someone else, or they worry about someone feeling upset at them.



The problem is that, in the moment, even minor consequences seem significant. Someone getting upset at you might seem like the end of the world as it's happening, but it doesn't actually have any dire consequences — no patient harm, trauma, or death. It was just a minor inconvenience.

This activity aims to define the kinds of consequences you experience — short-term ones that aren't too bad, long-term ones that you should do your best to avoid and red-flag consequences that absolutely must not happen.

Completing this short exercise will do two things: you will divide your boundaries into two categories: core and flex. Core boundaries are the ones that you remove only in the most dire of situations, while flex boundaries can be bent relatively often by comparison.

Activity: Defining Boundaries and Consequences

Q1. Think of a time where you didn't say 'no' to someone but regretted it. What would have happened if you were able to enforce your boundaries instead?

Q2. Think of a time when you were able to enforce a boundary, but someone got upset at you for it. Were the consequences that bad?



Q3. Define your consequences in the table below.

Short-Term Consequences	
Long-Term Consequences	
Red-Flag Consequences	

Q4. Fill out the table below to define your boundaries.

Core Boundaries	Flexible Boundaries



CPD time claimed:

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