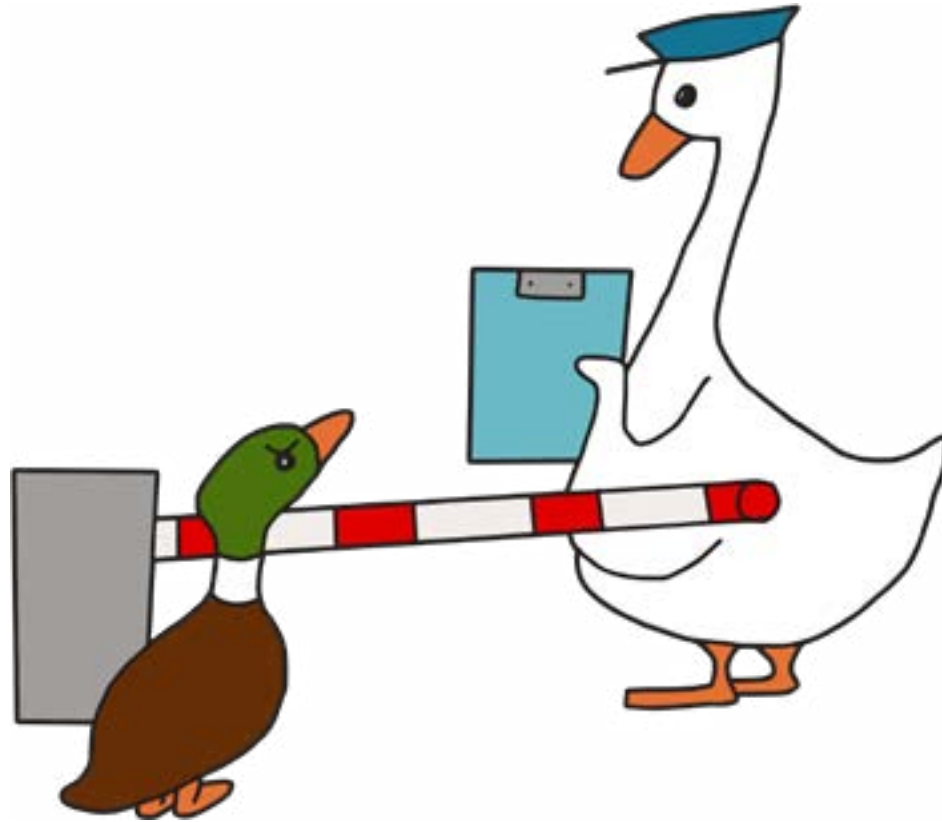




17 HACKS FOR GUARDING YOUR BOUNDARIES

by Aubrey Cole & Mags Thomson



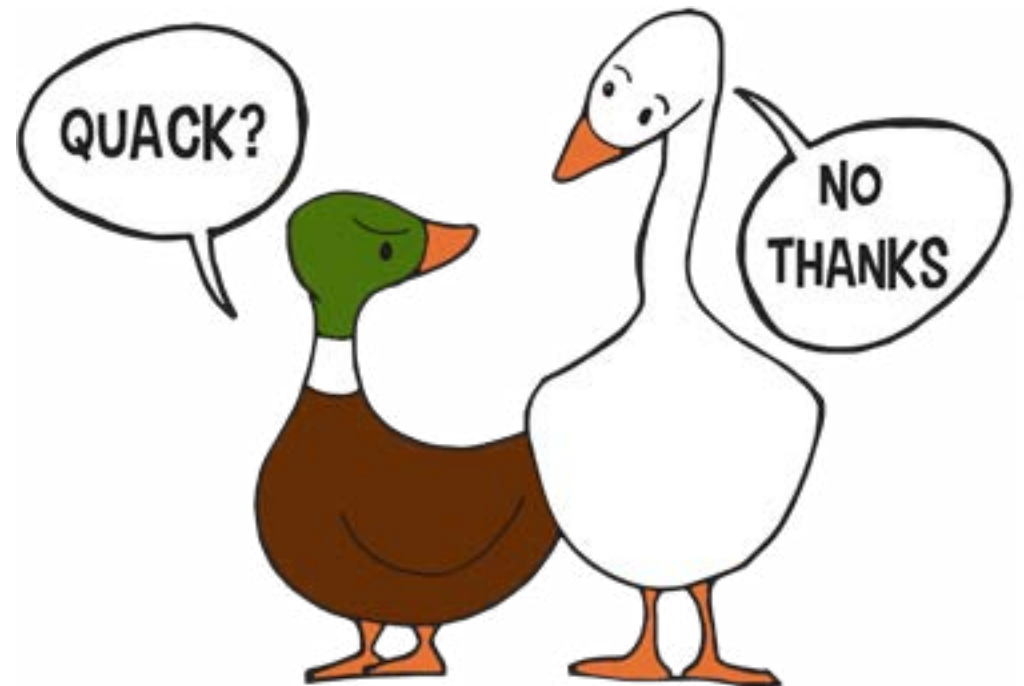


Setting up boundaries is not always about removing yourself physically. It can also be a way to create a part of your mind that is only yours. A place where you can think and process without external influences.

Setting boundaries is not always easy. Having a little bag of tricks you can rely on to make it a tad easier is never a bad idea. In this document you will find some of the strategies we use at SwanWaters.

#1 - 'No' Is A COMPLETE ANSWER

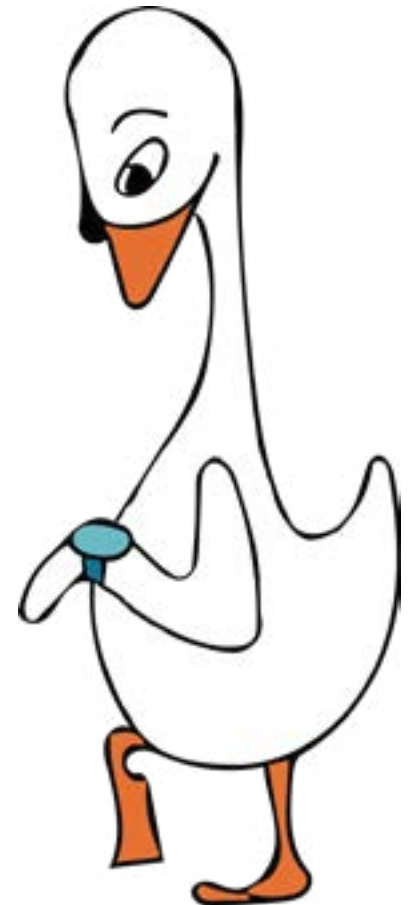
One thing that you have to realize is that 'no' is, in fact, a complete answer—as the saying goes. You may want to explain your refusal, but by no means do you have to. People may ask you for those justifications (usually as fodder for arguments that they want to start), but my advice is the following: just repeat your initial answer until they give up.



#2. – BLAME YOUR SCHEDULE

When someone asks for your help, and you are hesitant to say no, say you have a conflicting appointment instead. It deflects blame from you, and onto your schedule. It is the simplest of excuses, but also the only one that seemed to work with my siblings—although they usually insisted I give them extensive details of the other engagement. Try not to overcomplicate this. You don't want to get yourself tangled up in a big web of lies and excuses. A simple 'Oh, nothing interesting' should be enough.

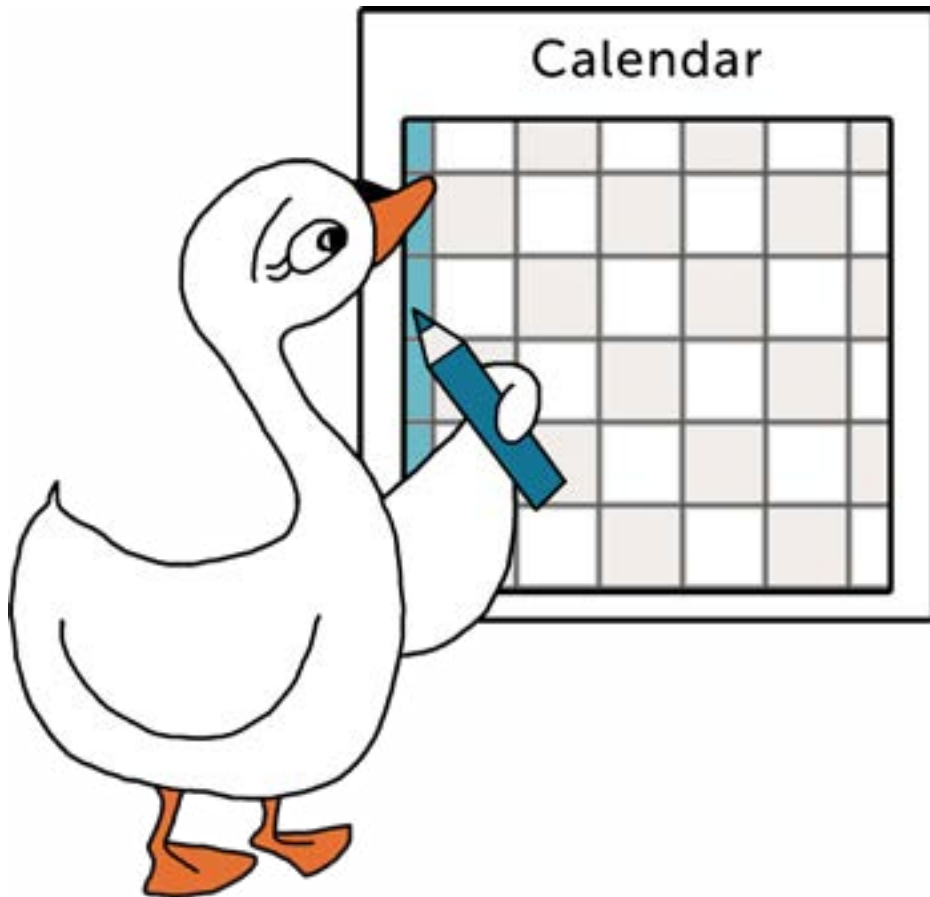
This strategy is a bit of a band aid rather than a cure, but it is totally acceptable for co-workers or other acquaintances.



#3. - TAKE SOME TIME

When dealing with particularly pushy people, answer with something like the following: "Let me get back to you on that." It gives you time to think about your answer, and the opportunity to practice your reply. It can also give you the opportunity to say no through a less personal medium than turning them down face-to-face.

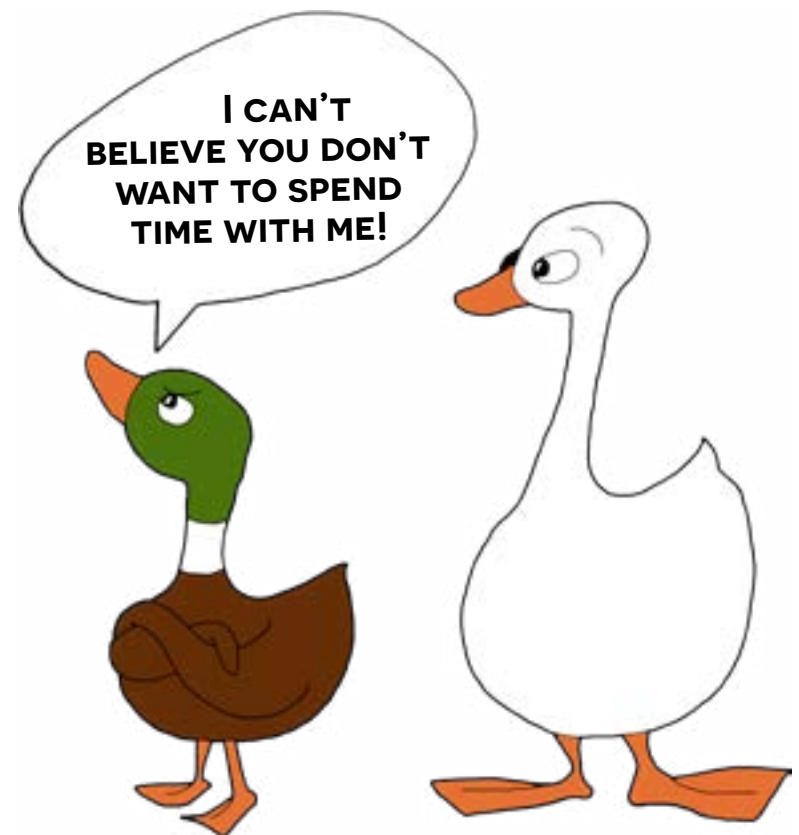
I sometimes found saying no right to someone's face too intimidating. So I would walk away with a "let me check my calendar". That way I could then easily answer their question by text or email later.



#4. - DON'T GET SUCKED INTO A DISCUSSION

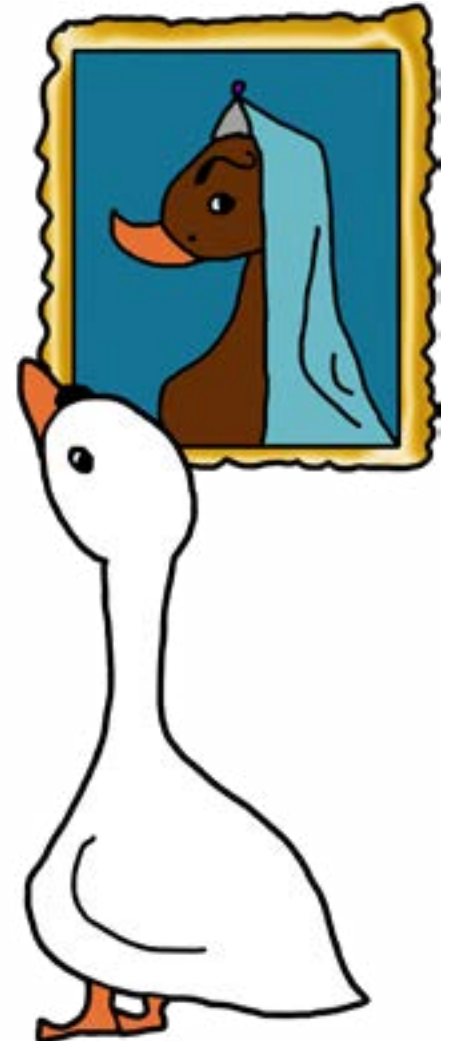
People that will not take no for an answer will want to engage in a discussion. Asking you for explanations will wear you down, and you may eventually give in. Usually repeating your reasoning will stop that.

When I first started saying 'no' to family members they did this a lot. So I learned to just keep repeating it, and some of its other variations: "No, I don't have the time to do that", etc. It finally helped maintain some boundaries, but it also landed me with the label Autistic (because people who say no are inflexible and therefore autistic, in case you missed my family's reasoning). Hey, at least they backed off.



#5. – MAKE A COUNTER PROPOSAL

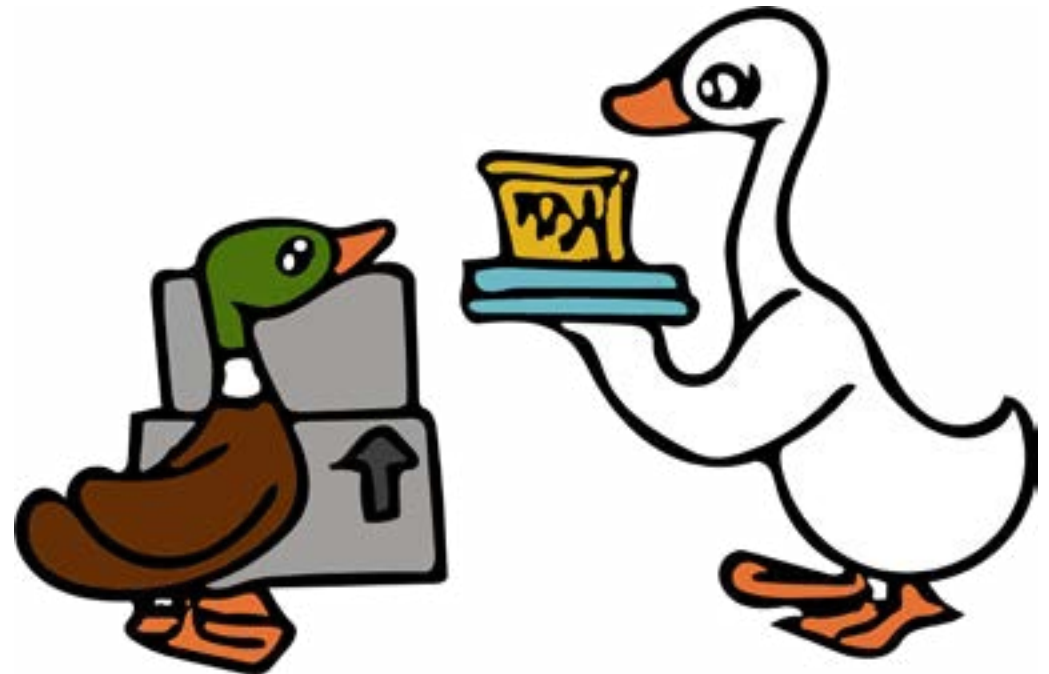
Are you really quite tempted to say 'yes', but you keep thinking about that pile of work on your desk? You know that saying 'yes' will mean burning the midnight oil to get your work done. So why not make a counter proposal? Propose a different time or a less time-consuming activity.



#6. – FIND SOMETHING YOU CAN DO

The counter proposal also works if you want to help, but cannot—or prefer not—to do whatever you were asked.

I used this a lot when people would ask me to help move, as I have bad knees that do not take kindly to carrying things up stairs. So I would for example suggest I take care of catering for the moving team.



#7. – THE “BROKEN RECORD” TECHNIQUE

The Broken Record technique utilizes the repetition of a few key responses and absolutely nothing else. You write down a collection of single sentence responses for common scenarios.

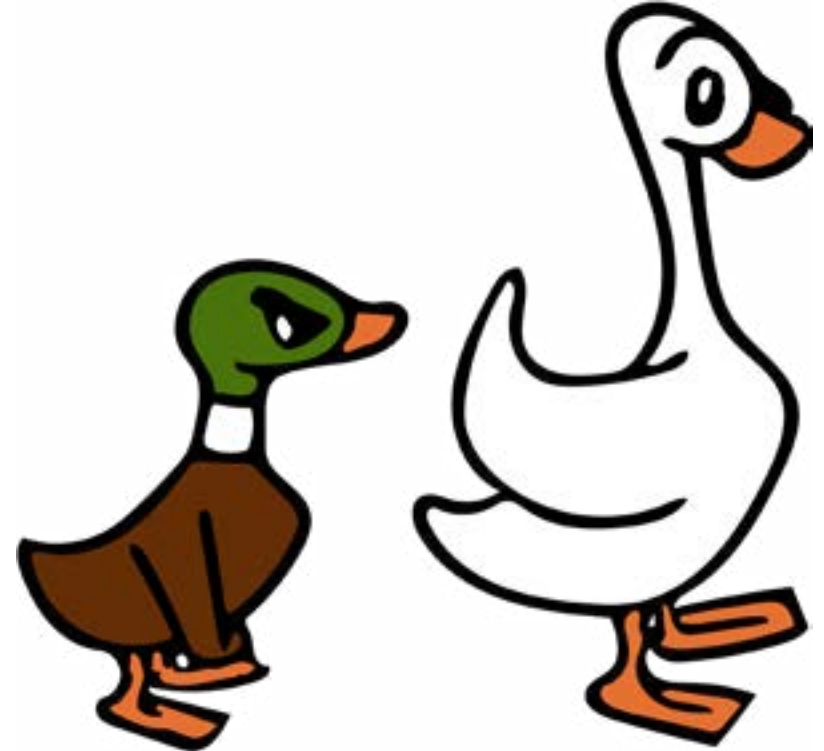
Does the narcissist repeatedly try to dodge or change the visitation pick-up and drop off times? *“As set forth in section X, sentence X of the Parenting Plan, your pick-up time is 6:00pm. There is an X minute grace period. Should you not arrive, it is assumed you have voluntarily surrendered this time.”* Direct, factual, never wavering, and repetitive. No matter how many times you get that text trying to pick a fight about “I want my time with my children,” this is your response. There are always potential extenuating circumstances, but the idea is to have canned responses that become boring.

As a side note, don’t let any attorney or ex bully you into allowing your abuser to have cell phone/text/email access to you on demand. People got divorced and had visitation just fine long before the internet and cell phones. You do not have to give your abuser 24/7/365 access to you. Period.



#8. – TALK TO THE HAND

The third technique, which I call “Talk to the Hand,” is really what worked for me. I needed to reclaim my life, my goals, my joy, and my abilities. Part of that was setting out on a journey to chase every possible dream I had—whether I thought it was realistic or not. I had spent almost my entire life listening to him give reasons why I could never do these things and instead of letting that continue to dominate my thoughts, I developed an attitude that said, “Don’t think so? Watch me.” Each time his voice invaded my thoughts, I responded with a variation of “talk to the hand because I’m not listening.” Every time I heard his voice, I redoubled my efforts; frequently yelling and swearing at him out loud. Seems nuts, but very therapeutic. Talk to the Hand is also bigger than in your head. It teaches you Do Not Respond (Do Not Respond) unless absolutely, positively necessary and in the most indirect way possible. This is how I have been able to maintain No Contact for over four years.



#9. – SLOWLY DOES IT!

Toxic people and abusers are likely to kick up a fight when they notice you leaving. If you are not (yet) ready to face that increase in toxicity, it may be helpful to slowly [limit contact](#). I say slowly because, otherwise, they may still respond to you setting boundaries as an attempt for you to get out.

Every time you find they have accepted a boundary, try another way to limit their access to you.



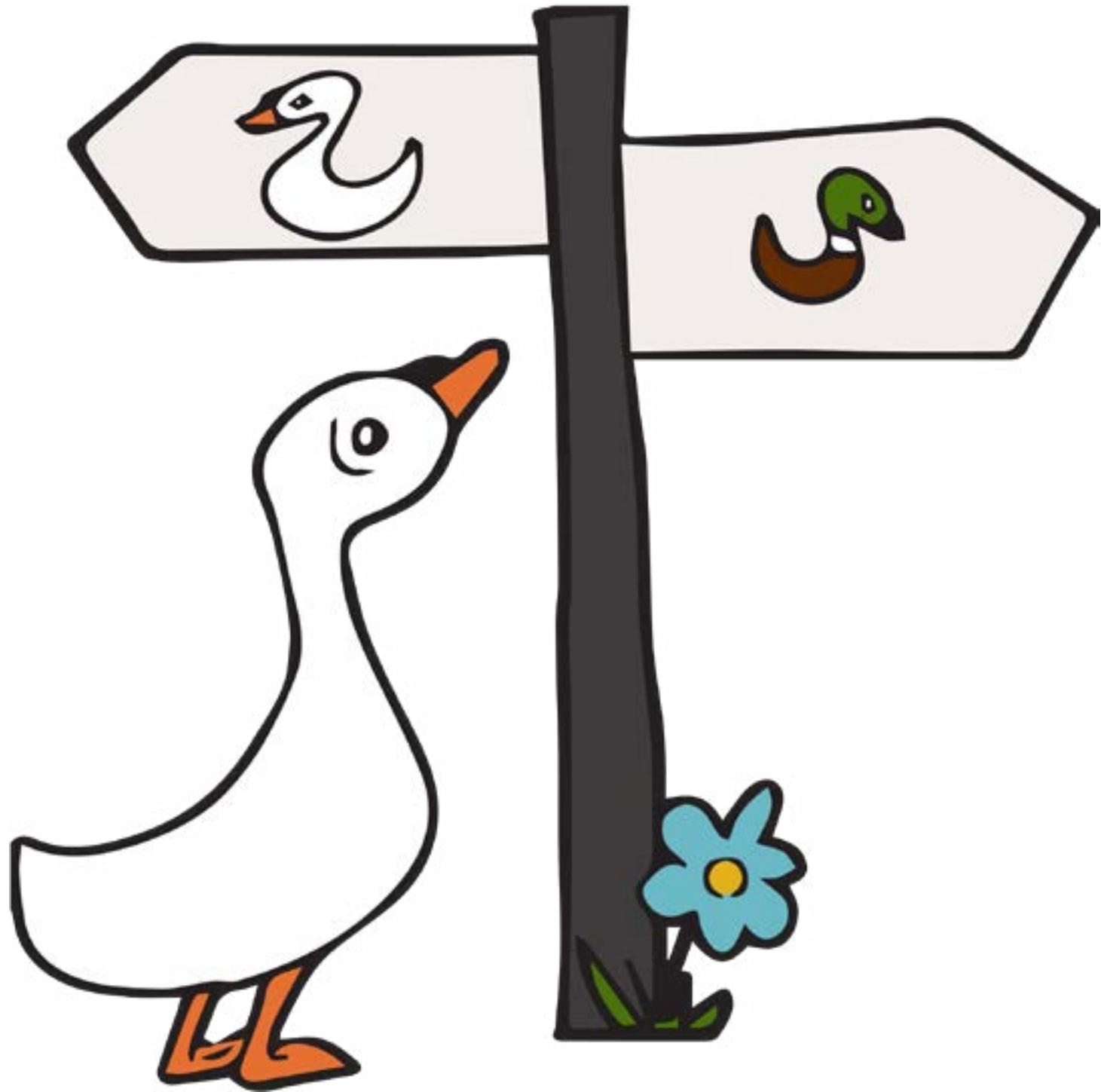
#10. – DECIDE WHAT ‘WINS’ YOU WILL GIVE AWAY

When it comes to boundaries and toxic people, I always reference dog training. In other words: consistency is key! Sometimes, though, it is okay to let them have a perceived win. They like the feeling of getting one over on you. So decide for yourself which wins you will give away.

For example, my parents write a letter to my in-laws about once every other Christmas. It's usually some negative martyr-style letter of woe questioning why their daughter has left them. It upsets my mother-in-law, especially, but she understands why I cannot keep subjecting myself to the content of these letters my parents send. Usually, the impact of the letter is that it becomes a point of conversation between the two of us—and actually a pretty positive one. At some point, we talked about the possibility of sending a cease and desist as a response. I explained to her, though, that—although I would fully support her—it would most likely lead to more letters. Because once my parents knew that they'd gotten to me, they would revel in having found a button that gets a response that made them feel powerful and in control again.

So we decided to let them get away with the biennial letter writing. As long as that keeps my parents off my back for the most part, we will accept it and deal with it.

Sometimes this is about picking your battles.



#11. – CUT THE VIRTUAL CORD

If you use social media, block, hide, and unfriend those people who are abusive toward you. You don't want to come across their faces and stories even when you are not in the same room as them. Besides, an emotional bully is always looking for ammunition, and your photos and stories about your personal life are great fodder.

Keeping yourself safe online is important, and being considerate of what you share is always good policy.

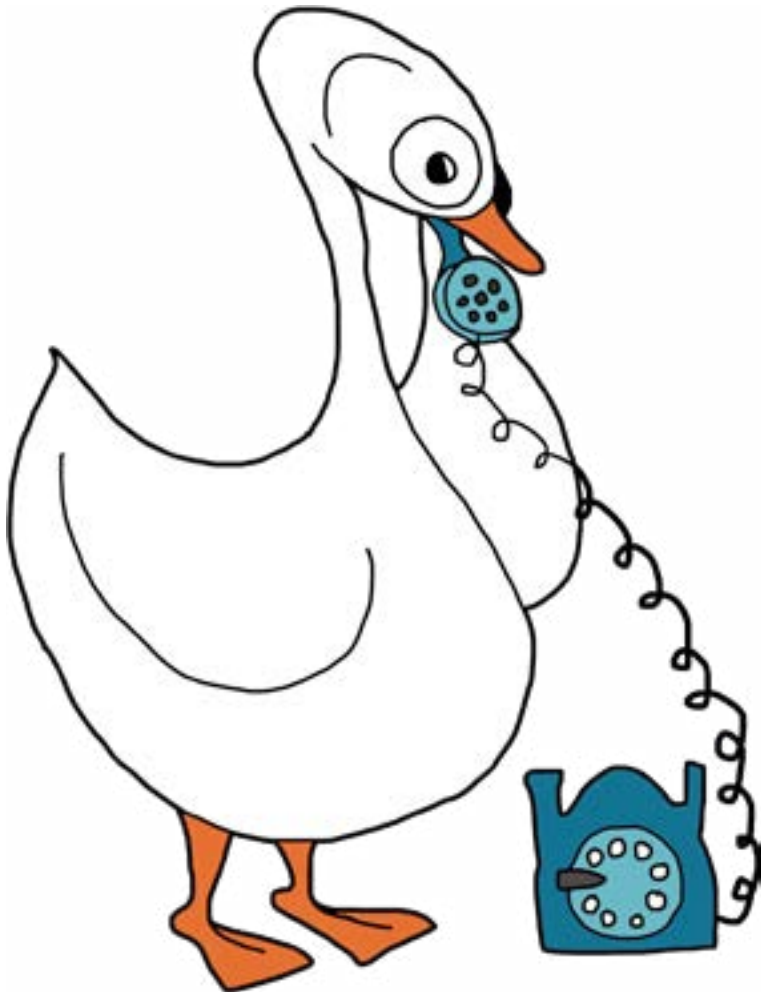
If you are not quite ready to unfriend or block, announce a "Facebook Fast"—they are pretty hip these days, and they give you a couple of weeks of not sharing information through your social media posts. Which means a couple of weeks that your toxic family or friends won't see what's going on for you.



#12. – You Do Not Need To ALWAYS Be Available

One factor in emotional abuse is not being allowed to have your own life and identity. Sometimes it seems that toxic people think you only pop into existence in their presence. So when they call, you had better answer on the first ring.

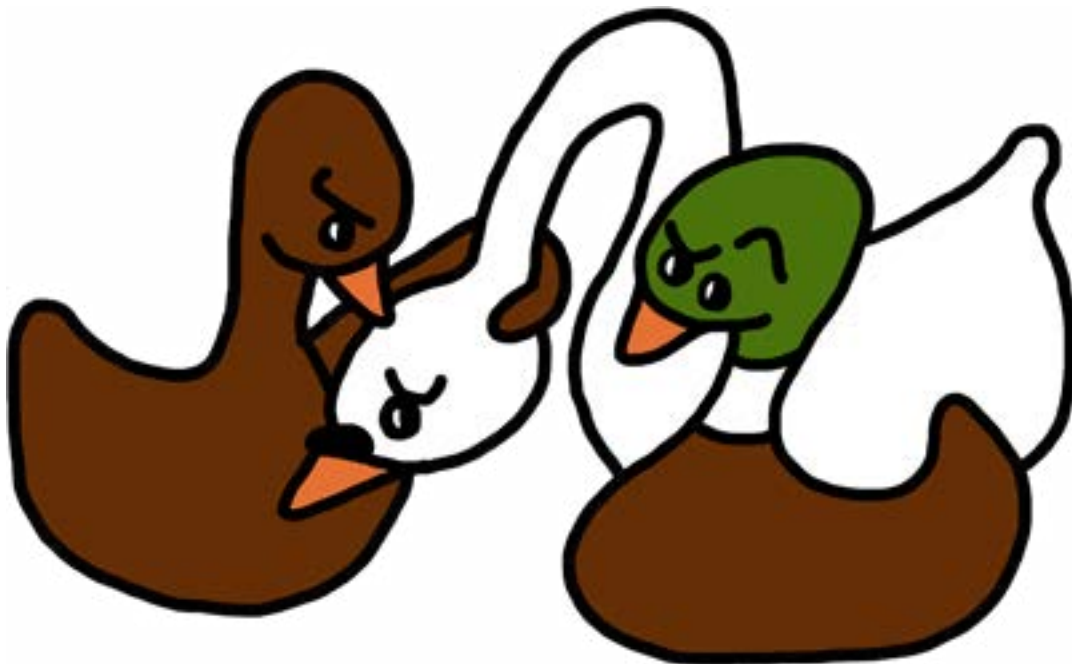
One way to start creating some distance and claiming space for yourself is not to jump to attention at the drop of a hat. Let your voice mail get it, or wait a day or two to answer their email. You will get some grief for it initially so be sure to stand your ground!



#13. – DON'T GET PULLED INTO GOSSIP AND COMPLAINING

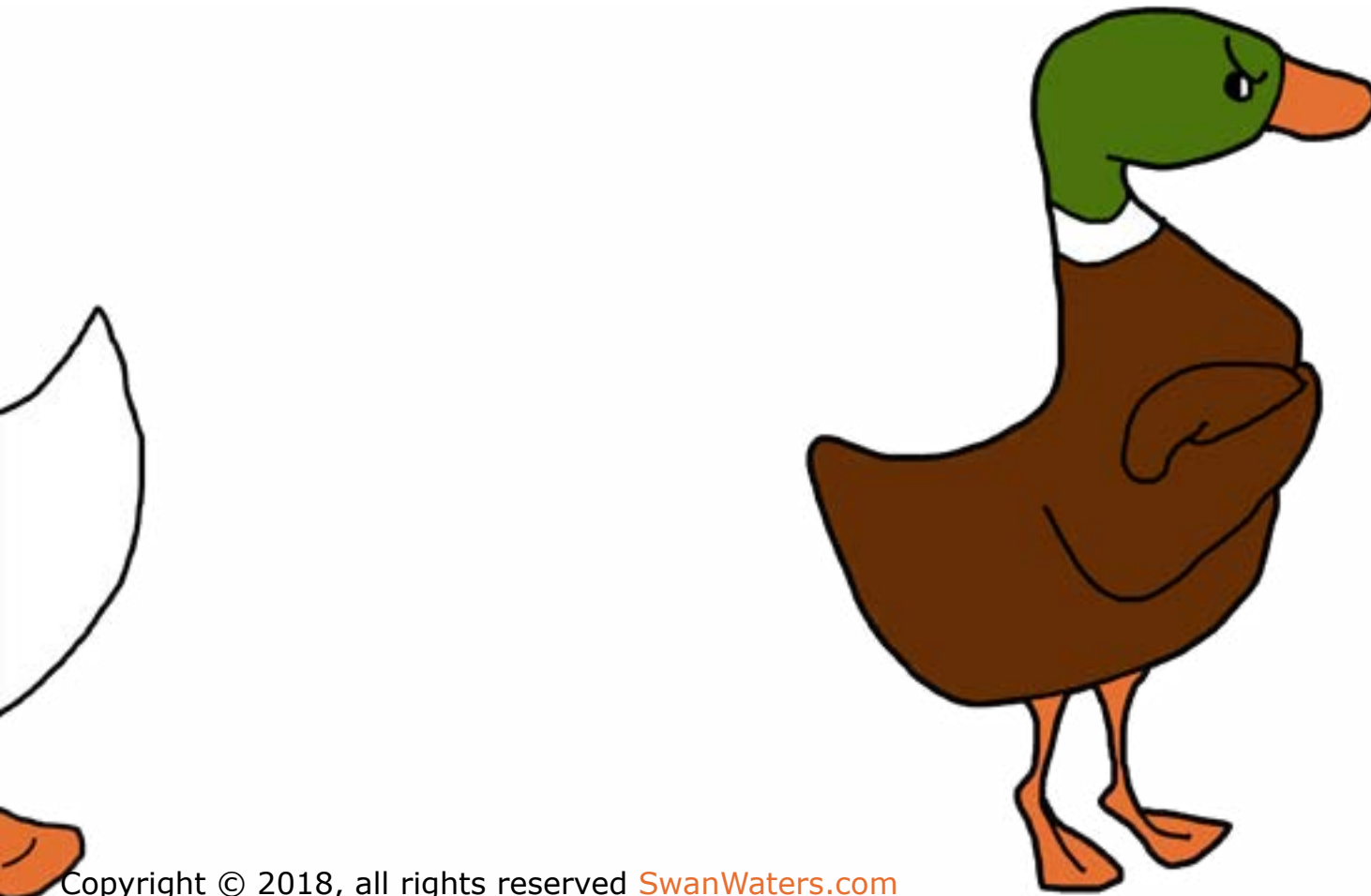
Toxic people like nothing more than complaining and gossiping. When you talk to a toxic person, there is nothing good enough and no-one free from judgment. Getting involved with their gossip will pull you into a black hole of negativity. Do not get pulled into that vortex.

Not only will this negativity drag you down and mess up your energy, whatever you say can—and will—be used against you. If you engage in a conversation about the neighbor, you can be sure that the toxic person will be having a little chat with them about it later. And be sure that they'll turn it around on you by saying, 'You will never believe what so-and-so said about you! I thought I would let you know, because I would hate for that rumor to be spread behind your back!'



#14. – MAKE SURE YOU HAVE AN EXIT STRATEGY

Toxic people truly believe that the world revolves around them. So the idea that you would not want to spend all your time with them is alien to them. So not only should you jump when they say jump, you should continue jumping until they are bored. It can be difficult to get away, and so having an exit strategy can be very helpful. When you meet, make it an activity with a clearly defined end.



#15. - STICK TO BREEZY TOPICS

Talking about topics that are of significance gives the toxic person more information to be used against you. When you talk about an incident at work, a row you had with your significant other, or even a day with your family that made you truly happy, you give the bully more insight into your emotional state. More insight means more information to perform a custom attack to cause the most possible drama and upheaval.

If you can, stick to shooting the breeze. Answer questions about your life with empty phrases like 'good' and 'yes, everything is fine'. Then talk about the weather, or the latest top 40 hit that has been playing day and night.



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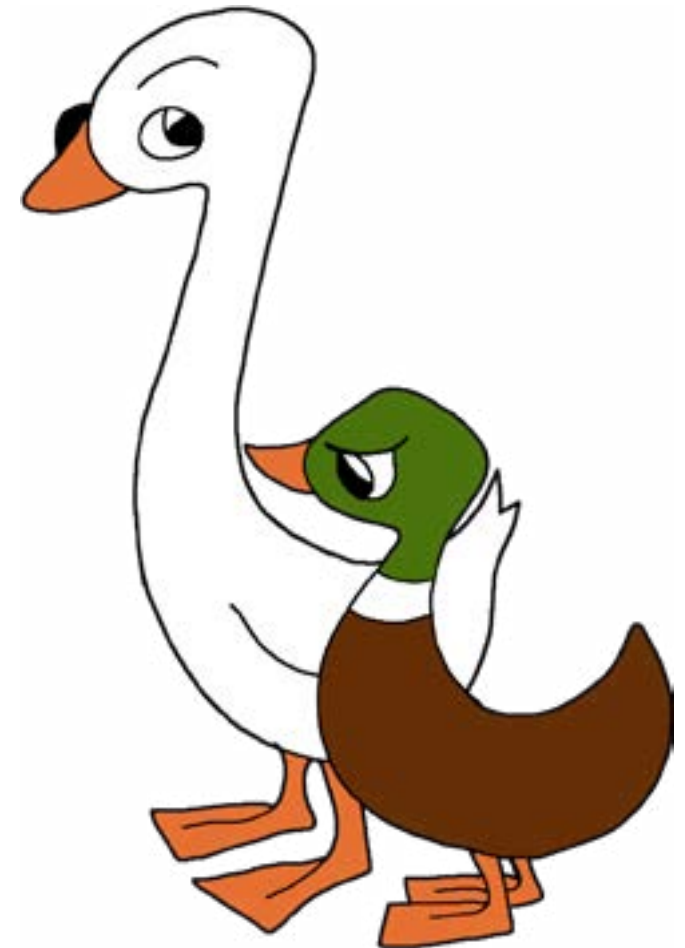
#16. – KEEP YOUR CONVERSATION POSITIVE

This can be complicated because they will be on the hunt for drama. This means they will try to get you to talk about problems. To a drama hunter, a simple remark like, 'Suzy is doing so much better in school' will easily translate to, 'Suzy was doing badly in school.' So remarking that 'Suzy is doing so well in school' is a much safer expression to use.



#17. - SAY NO TO ALONE TIME

In this case, by alone time I mean the following: time alone with your bully. Emotional bullies prefer to unleash their terror behind closed doors. So make sure there are others around who can help. Toxic people are often quite aware of acceptable behavior and can mimic it like a master. Having people around means they will want to keep their masks on. Having witnesses makes it harder for them to throw a tantrum, gaslight you, or use any of the other tricks of their trade.



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