



# **“NO MORE MR. NICE GUY”**

## **BREAKING FREE ACTIVITIES**

This book presents a practical and effective guide for breaking free from the negative effects of the Nice Guy Syndrome. This program has worked for countless men and it can work for you or a loved one.

To help facilitate this process, I present numerous Breaking Free activities throughout the book.

These Breaking Free activities serve to facilitate the paradigm shift that is necessary for recovery from the Nice Guy Syndrome. They will not only help recovering Nice Guys understand where their paradigms came from, but will help replace them with more accurate and up-to-date ones. These assignments will also point recovering Nice Guys in a direction that will help them start doing things differently.



# Breaking Free: Activity #1

Write down three possible safe people or groups that might be able to provide support for you in your recovery from the Nice Guy Syndrome.

If no one comes to mind, get out the telephone directory and look up counselors or support groups in the phone book. Write down three names and phone numbers and call them when you finish this chapter. If you are employed by a company with an Employee Assistance Program, this is another resource. If you know someone who has been to therapy or a support group, ask them for information. If you have access to the internet you can search for 12-step groups or support groups.



# Breaking Free: Activity #2

Why would it seem rational for a person to try to eliminate or hide certain things about himself and try to become something different unless there was a significant compelling reason for him to do so? Why do people try to change who they really are?



# Breaking Free: Activity #3

It is impossible to cover every factor that might cause a young boy to try to hide his perceived flaws and seek approval from others. I don't believe it is essential for Nice Guys to uncover every experience that ever made them feel unsafe or bad. But I have found that some understanding of where a life script originated is helpful in changing that script.

Reread the stories of Alan, Jason, and Jose. Think about how these stories are similar to your own childhood experiences. On a separate piece of paper or journal, write down or illustrate the messages you received in your family that seemed to imply that it wasn't OK for you to be who you were, just as you were. Share these experiences with a safe person. As you do, make note of your feelings. Do you feel sad, angry, lonely, numb? Share this information as well.

The purpose of this assignment is to name, rather than blame. Blaming will keep you stuck. Naming the childhood experiences that led you to believe that it was not a safe or acceptable thing for you to be just who you were will allow you replace these messages with more accurate ones and help you change your Nice Guy script.



# Breaking Free: Activity #4

I've taken surveys in several No More Mr. Nice Guy! groups asking the members about the attachments they use to try to get external approval. The following are just a few of the responses. Look over the list. Note any of the ways in which you seek approval. Add to the list any behaviors that are uniquely you. Write down examples of each. Ask others for feedback about the ways in which they see you seeking approval.

- Having one's hair just right.
- Being smart.
- Having a pleasant, non-threatening voice.
- Looking unselfish.
- Being different from other men.
- Staying sober.
- Being in good shape.
- Being a great dancer.
- Being a good lover.
- Never getting angry.
- Making other people happy.
- Being a good worker.
- Having a clean car.
- Dressing well.
- Being nice.
- Respecting women.
- Never offending anyone.
- Looking like a good father



# Breaking Free: Activity #5

If you did not care what people thought of you, how would you live your life differently?

If you were not concerned with getting the approval of women, how would your relationships with the opposite sex be different?



# Breaking Free: Activity #6

Look over the lists above. Write down examples of situations in which you have tried to hide or distract attention from any of these perceived flaws. How effective do you think you are in keeping these things hidden from the people you love?



# Breaking Free: Activity #7

Do you believe that people can see your human imperfections and still love you?

How would you be different if you knew the people who care about you would never leave you or stop loving you — no matter what?





# Breaking Free: Activity #8

Go back to the list of approval-seeking behaviors at the beginning of this chapter. Choose one of the ways you try to get external validation and do one of the following:

1. Go on a moratorium from this behavior. Set a period of time to stop doing it. Tell the people around you what you are doing. If you slip, tell a safe person about it. Use the slip as information about why, in that particular moment, you felt the need to get external approval.
2. Consciously do more of this behavior. This may not make logical sense, but it is a powerful way to explore any dysfunctional behavior. Observe how you feel when you consciously try harder to get external validation.



# Breaking Free: Activity #9

Begin with the list above and add good things that you can do for yourself. Put the list up where you will see it and choose at least one thing per day and do it for yourself.



# Breaking Free: Activity #10

Make a list of positive affirmations about yourself. Write them on note cards and place them where you will see them regularly. Change the cards often so they stay fresh. When you read affirmations, close your eyes and fully embrace the meaning of the words. Observe any tendency of your mind to reject the affirmations in favor of old, deeply held beliefs.

The following are some possible affirmations:

- “I am lovable just as I am.”
- “I am perfectly imperfect.”
- “My needs are important.”
- “I am a strong and powerful person.”
- “I can handle it.”
- “People love and accept me just as I am.”
- “It is OK to be human and make mistakes.”
- “I am the only person I have to please.”



# Breaking Free: Activity #11

Plan a weekend trip to the mountains or beach. If possible, plan a vacation or retreat for a week or longer by yourself to a place where no one knows you. Visit a foreign country by yourself if at all possible. Use this time as an opportunity for self-observation and reflection. Keep a journal. Practice good self-care. Take along this book and spend time doing the Breaking Free exercises. When you return home, observe how you are different and how long it takes for you to begin returning to familiar patterns.



# Breaking Free: Activity #12

Do you believe it is OK for you to have needs? Do you believe people want to help you meet your needs? Do you believe this world is a place of abundance?



# Breaking Free: Activity #13

Identify at least one covert contract between you and a significant other. What do you give? What do you expect in return? Share this information with the other person. Ask the person how it feels to respond to an unclear agenda.



# Breaking Free: Activity #14

Identify two or three examples of your caretaking behavior. In order to stimulate awareness of your caretaking, do one of the following for a period of one week:

1. Go on a caretaking moratorium. Because Nice Guys have a difficult time differentiating between caring and caretaking, stop giving completely (except to young, dependent children). Tell people what you are doing so they won't be confused. Observe your feelings and other people's reactions.
2. Consciously try to caretake more than you already do. As odd as this assignment may sound, it is a very effective way to create awareness of your caretaking behavior. Pay attention to how you feel and how other people react to you.



# Breaking Free: Activity #15

It can be difficult to make a direct link between your caretaking behavior and the emotional pukes which inevitably follow. Observe the ways you hurt the people you love.

- Do you make cutting remarks or hurtful “jokes”?
- Do you embarrass them in public?
- Are you frequently late?
- Do you “forget” things they’ve asked you to do?
- Do you criticize them?
- Do you withdraw from them or threaten to leave?
- Do you let frustration build until you blow up at them?

Ask the significant others in your life to give you feedback about your caretaking and emotional pukes. This information may be hard to hear and may trigger a shame attack, but it is important information for breaking out of the victim triangle.





# Breaking Free: Activity #16

Make a decision to put yourself first for a weekend or even a whole week. Tell the people around you what you are doing. Ask a friend to support you and encourage you in this process. Pay attention to your initial anxiety. Pay attention to your tendency to revert to old patterns. At the end of the time period, ask the people around you what it was like for them when you put yourself first.

Remember, you don't have to do it perfectly. Just do it.



# Breaking Free: Activity #17

Look over the following list of ways Nice Guys try to create a smooth, problem-free life. Write down an example of how you used each coping mechanism in childhood. Then, next to each, give an example of how you use this strategy to try to control your world in adulthood. Note how each of these behaviors keeps you feeling like a powerless victim. Share this information with a safe person.

- Doing it right.
- Playing it safe.
- Anticipating and fixing.
- Trying not to rock the boat.
- Being charming and helpful.
- Never being a moment's problem.
- Using covert contracts.
- Controlling and manipulating.
- Caretaking and pleasing.
- Withholding information.
- Repressing feelings.
- Making sure other people don't have feelings.
- Avoiding problems and difficult situations.



# Breaking Free: Activity #18

Think about one “gift” from the universe, which you initially resisted but can now be seen as a positive stimulus for growth or discovery.

Are there any similar gifts in your life right now to which you need to surrender?

Share this information with a safe person.



# Breaking Free: Activity #19

Pick one area in your life in which you routinely feel frustrated or out of control. Step back from the situation. Is the difficulty you are having with the situation the result of you trying to project the reality you want to believe onto it? If you had to accept the reality of this situation, how might you change your response to it?



# Breaking Free: Activity #20

Some guidelines about expressing feelings.

- Don't focus on the other person, "You are making me mad."

Instead, take responsibility for what you are feeling:  
"I am feeling angry."

- Don't use feeling words to describe what you are thinking, as in "I feel like Joe was trying to take advantage of me."

Instead, pay attention to what you are experiencing in your body: "I'm feeling helpless and frightened."

- In general, try to begin feeling statements with "I", rather than "you."

Try to avoid the crutch of saying "I feel like." As in "I feel like you are being mean to me."



# Breaking Free: Activity #21

List one fear that has been controlling your life. Once you decide to confront the fear, begin repeating to yourself, “I can handle it. No matter what happens, I will handle it.” Keep repeating this mantra until you take action and stop feeling fear.



# Breaking Free: Activity #22

Choose one area in which you have been out of integrity. Identify your fear that keeps you from telling the truth or doing the right thing. Reveal this situation to a safe person. Then go and tell the truth or do what you have to do to make the situation right. Tell yourself you can handle it. Since telling the truth may create a crisis for you or others, have faith that everyone involved will survive this crisis.



# Breaking Free: Activity #23

Before you can start setting boundaries, you have to become aware of how much you back up from your line to avoid conflict or to keep the peace. For the next week, observe yourself. Do you say “yes” when you would rather say “no”? Do you agree to do something to avoid conflict? Do you avoid doing something because someone might get upset at you? Do you tolerate an intolerable situation, hoping that it will just go away? Write these observations down and share them with a safe person.





# Breaking Free: Activity #24

Look over the list above. Note the ways you have consciously or unconsciously tried to be different from your father and/or other men. How does the belief that you are different keep you disconnected from other men?



# Breaking Free: Activity #25

List three men whom you would like to get to know better. Next to each man's name list a possible activity you could do together. Next to this, write down a date and make a commitment to contact him by this day.



# Breaking Free: Activity #26

Identify three ways in which you neglect your body. Write down three ways in which you can start taking better care of yourself.



# Breaking Free: Activity #27

Visualize what you think a healthy male would look like. What personality traits would he possess? Write these down. Do you know anyone who has a number of these traits? How could you use this person as a healthy role model?



# Breaking Free: Activity #28

Embracing masculinity involves coming to see Dad more accurately. To facilitate this process, create a list. On the left side, list a number of your father's characteristics. Write the opposite characteristic on the right side.

Indicate where on the spectrum between the two that you see yourself.

When recovering Nice Guys do this exercise they are often surprised at what they discover about their fathers and themselves.

They often see how they have made their fathers into a caricature — a distortion of who they really are. They may realize that if the man they have become is based on a reaction to how they saw their fathers, they too have become caricatures. Remember, the opposite of crazy is still crazy.

They realize that if their lives are a reaction to Dad, then Dad is still in control.

They discover that they can be different from Dad without being the opposite.

They often come to realize that they have more traits in common with their fathers than they had previously realized or wanted to accept.



# Breaking Free: Activity #29

How can you provide a healthy male support system for the boys and young men you know? List three boys along with an activity you can participate in with them.



# Breaking Free: Activity #30

Are you an enmeshmer or an avoider in your present relationship? How would your partner see you? Does the pattern ever change? What roles have you played in past relationships?



# Breaking Free: Activity #31

We tend to be attracted to people who have some of the worst traits of both of our parents. Instead of blaming your partner for your unconscious choice, identify the ways in which she helps you recreate familiar relationship patterns from your childhood. Share this with your partner.





# Breaking Free: Activity #32

The following are a few of the ways Nice Guys unconsciously maintain a monogamous bond to their mothers. Look over the list. Note any of the behavior patterns that may serve to keep you monogamous to your mother. Share this information with a safe person.

- Over-involvement with work or hobbies.
- Creating relationships with people who need fixing.
- Addictions to drugs or alcohol.
- Sexual addictions to pornography, masturbation, fantasy, chat lines, or hookers.
- Affairs.
- Sexual dysfunction — lack of desire, inability to get or maintain an erection, or premature ejaculation.
- Forming relationships with women who are angry, sick, depressive, compulsive, addicted, unfaithful, or otherwise unavailable.
- Avoiding intercourse or taking vows of celibacy.



# Breaking Free: Activity #33

List some of the ways you try to please your partner. What changes would you make if you did not have to worry about making her happy?



# Breaking Free: Activity #34

Are there any areas in your personal relationships in which you avoid setting appropriate boundaries? Do you:

- Tolerate intolerable behavior.
- Avoid dealing with a situation because it might cause conflict.
- Not ask for what you want.
- Sacrifice yourself to keep the peace.

If you applied the Second Date rule or the Healthy Male rule to these situations, how might you change your behavior?



# Breaking Free: Activity #35

The next time you find yourself feeling frustrated, resentful, or rageful at your partner, ask yourself these questions:

- Why have I invited this person into my life?
- What do I need to learn from this situation?
- How would my view of this situation change if I saw it as a gift?



# Breaking Free: Activity #36

How's your love life? Are you ready to start getting good sex? If so, read on.



# Breaking Free: Activity #37

Find a safe place to talk about the following issues:

- **Your sexual history:** Earliest sexual memory, childhood experiences, sexual violation and trauma, sexual issues in your family, first sexual experience, adult sexual history.
- **Ways in which you have acted out sexually:** Affairs, prostitution, peep shows, 900 numbers, use of pornography, exhibitionism, fetishes, etc.
- **Your dark side:** Those things that even you have a hard time looking at in yourself — fantasies, rage, offending behavior.



# Breaking Free: Activity #38

Set aside a time to practice healthy masturbation. Choose a comfortable place where you will be undisturbed. Practice by looking at yourself and touching yourself without using pornography or fantasy. Pay attention to how it feels to experience your sexuality without any goals or agendas (such as having an orgasm). Also observe any tendency to distract yourself from what you are experiencing (going into fantasy, becoming goal-oriented, having distracting thoughts, loss of physical sensation). Just observe these experiences and use them as information about your shame and fear.



# Breaking Free: Activity #39

Consider going on a sexual moratorium. Consciously refrain from sex for a predetermined period of time. No matter what your sexual situation is, it can be a powerful learning experience. Most guys initially resist the idea, but once they make the decision to do it, they find it to be a very positive experience. A sexual moratorium can have many benefits:

- Helps break dysfunction cycles.
- Eliminates pursuing and distancing.
- Releases resentment.
- Allows the Nice Guy to see that he can live without sex.
- Helps the Nice Guy realize that no one else but him holds the key to his sexual experience.
- Helps the Nice Guy see how he settles for bad sex.
- Eliminates fear that the Nice Guy's partner can withhold sex or approval.
- Helps the Nice Guy pay attention to the meaning of sexual impulses.  
Whenever the Nice Guy feels the impulse to be sexual, he can automatically ask him- self, "Why am I feeling sexual?"
- Helps break addictive patterns by eliminating compulsive masturbation, pornography, and other addictive behaviors.
- Helps the Nice Guy begin to address feelings he has been avoiding with sex.

Before beginning a sexual moratorium, discuss it with your partner. It helps to set a specific time. I suggest three to six months. It can be done.

Decide on the parameters of the moratorium. Once you have begun, pay attention to slips and sabotaging behaviors, from both you and your partner. Remember, it is a learning experience. You don't have to do it perfectly.





# Breaking Free: Activity #40

Look over the list below. Choose one of the items and name a tangible fear from your life. Write down how you will confront that specific issue. Then, take a small step toward facing that fear. Ask someone to encourage and support you. Don't try to do it alone.

- Remember, no matter what happens, you will handle it.
- Ask for a raise or promotion
- Quit an unsatisfying job
- Start your own business
- Go back to school
- Confront a conflict situation
- Promote an idea or something you have created
- Pursue a lifelong goal
- Spend more time with a hobby or interest



# Breaking Free: Activity #41

What do you really want in life? What prevents you from making it happen? Write down three things you want to make happen in your life. Then write a personal affirmation that will take you where you want to go and post it on a sheet of paper where you can see it. Share your dreams and your affirmation with a safe person.



# Breaking Free: Activity #42

How does your perfectionism or need to do it right get in the way of realizing your passion and potential? Pick one thing that you have always wanted to do: Write a book, turn your hobby into a business, move, go back to school, fully embrace a talent.

Now, ask yourself the question: If you knew ahead of time that this endeavor would be a success, would you hesitate to do it? Would this knowledge set you free from the belief that you have to do it perfectly? Would this knowledge motivate you to get started or complete what you have already begun? What risks would you be willing to take if you knew ahead of time that there was no way for you to fail?

What are you waiting for? Let go of the need to do it perfectly and just do it!



# Breaking Free: Activity #43

Do you believe your needs are important? Do you believe other people want to help you meet your needs?

On a sheet of paper, make a list of helpers you have in your life right now. These can be friends and family members. They can be professionals such as doctors, lawyers, therapists, and CPAs. After making the list, answer the following questions:

- What kind of helpers do you still need?
- How can you use these helpers more effectively?
- How do you prevent these people from helping you?

Start looking for opportunities to ask these people for help. Build networks. Before asking for help, repeat the affirmation: ***This person wants to help me get my needs met.***



# Breaking Free: Activity #44

Identify how you sabotage yourself. Once you have identified your patterns, determine what you have to do differently to get what you really want. Review each item below and identify specific behaviors that will help you stop sabotaging yourself and achieve your goals.

- Focus
- Do it now
- Accept “good enough” rather than “perfect”
- Finish what you start
- Don’t start new projects until the old ones are completely finished
- Don’t make excuses
- Detach from other people’s problems

Share your strategy with a safe person. Check in with them on a regular basis to monitor how you are doing (failing to do this part would be an effective way to sabotage yourself).



# Breaking Free: Activity #45

Set this e-book down for a few moments and close your eyes. Take a couple of deep breaths and exhale slowly. Clear your mind.

Once you are relaxed, picture yourself living in an abundant world. In this abundant world, there are no restraints or limitations. Good things flow past you continuously. Imagine every abundant thing you have ever desired — car, home, friends, love, joy, wealth, success, peace of mind, challenge. Visualize yourself living your life surrounded by this abundance.

Repeat this visualization several times a day until it begins to feel real to you. Open your arms, your heart, and your mind. Get out of the way, and let it happen.



# Breaking Free: Activity #46

Read over the list of rules below. Try a few of them on for size. Add to the list your own personal rules. Write these rules on note cards and put them where you can see them every day.

1. If it frightens you, do it.
2. Don't settle. Every time you settle, you get exactly what you settled for.
3. Put yourself first.
4. No matter what happens, you will handle it.
5. Whatever you do, do it 100%.
6. If you do what you have always done, you will get what you have always got.
7. You are the only person on this planet responsible for your needs, wants, and happiness.
8. Ask for what you want.
9. If what you are doing isn't working, try something different.
10. Be clear and direct.
11. Learn to say "no."
12. Don't make excuses.
13. If you are an adult, you are old enough to make your own rules.



14. Let people help you.
15. Be honest with yourself.
16. Do not let anyone treat you badly. No one. Ever.
17. Remove yourself from a bad situation instead of waiting for the situation to change.
18. Don't tolerate the intolerable — ever.
19. Stop blaming. Victims never succeed.
20. Live with integrity. Decide what feels right to you, then do it.
21. Accept the consequences of your actions.
22. Be good to yourself.
23. Think “abundance.”
24. Face difficult situations and conflict head on.
25. Don't do anything in secret.
26. Do it now.
27. Be willing to let go of what you have so you can get what you want.
28. Have fun. If you are not having fun, something is wrong.
29. Give yourself room to fail. There are no mistakes, only learning experiences.
30. Control is an illusion. Let go; let life happen.

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