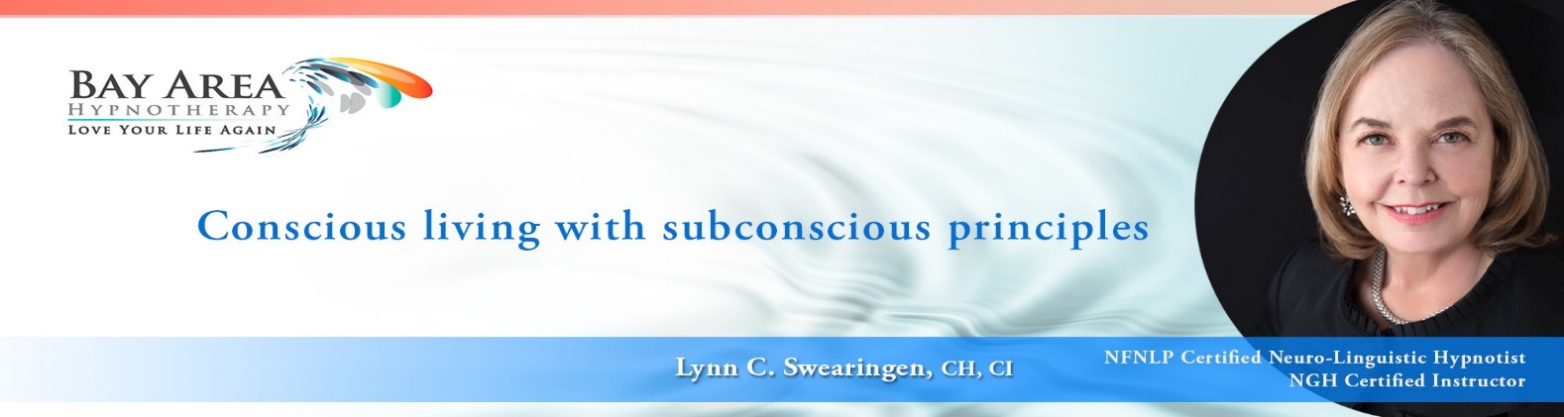
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This article is excellent scientific validation for why we do what we do, as hypnotists.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/words-can-change-your-brain/201208/why-word-is-so-dangerous-say-or-hear>

### [Andrew Newberg, M.D. and Mark Waldman](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/contributors/andrew-newberg-md-and-mark-waldman)

[**Words Can Change Your Brain**](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/words-can-change-your-brain)

# Why This Word Is So Dangerous to Say or Hear

## This word can damage both the speaker’s and listener’s brain.

Posted August 1, 2012 | [Reviewed by Gary Drevitch](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/about-reviewed-by-pt-staff)

If I were to put you into an fMRI scanner—a huge donut-shaped magnet that can take a video of the [neural](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/neuroscience) changes in your brain—and flash the word “NO” for less than one second, you’d see a sudden release of dozens of [stress](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/stress)-producing [hormones](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/hormones) and neurotransmitters. These chemicals immediately interrupt the normal functioning of your brain, impairing logic, reason, language processing, and communication.

In fact, **just seeing a list of negative words for a few seconds will make a highly**[**anxious**](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/anxiety)**or depressed person feel worse**, and **the more you ruminate on them, the more you can actually damage key structures** that regulate your [memory](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/memory), feelings, and emotions. [1] You’ll disrupt your sleep, your [appetite](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/appetite), and your ability to experience long-term [happiness](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/happiness) and satisfaction.

**If you vocalize your negativity, or even slightly frown when you say “no,” more stress chemicals will be released, not only in your brain, but in the listener’s as well.** [2] The listener will experience increased anxiety and irritability, thus undermining [cooperation](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/teamwork) and trust. In fact, just hanging around negative people will make you more prejudiced toward others. [3]

**Any form of negative rumination**—for example, worrying about your financial future or health—**will stimulate the release of destructive neurochemicals**. The same holds true for children: The more negative thoughts they have, the more likely they are to experience emotional turmoil. [4] But if you teach them to think positively, you can turn their lives around. [5]

[**Negative thinking**](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/pessimism)**is also self-perpetuating**, and the more you engage in negative dialogue—at home or at work—the more difficult it becomes to stop. [6] But **negative words**, spoken with [anger](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/anger), do even more damage. They send alarm messages through the brain, interfering with the [decision-making](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/decision-making) centers in the frontal lobe, and this increases a person’s propensity to act irrationally.

[**Fear**](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/fear)**-provoking words**—like poverty, illness, and death—also stimulate the brain in negative ways. And even if these fearful thoughts are not real, other parts of the brain (like the thalamus and amygdala) react to negative [fantasies](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/fantasies) as though they were actual threats occurring in the outside world. Curiously, we seem to be hardwired to worry, perhaps an artifact of old memories carried from ancestral times when there were countless threats to our survival. [7]

**To interrupt this natural propensity to worry, several steps can be taken.** First, ask yourself: “Is the situation really a threat to my personal survival?” Usually, it isn’t, and the faster you can interrupt the amygdala’s reaction to an imagined threat, the quicker you can take action to solve the problem. You’ll also reduce the possibility of burning a permanent negative memory into your brain. [8]

**After you have identified the negative thought** (which often operates just below the level of everyday consciousness), **you can reframe it** by choosing to focus on positive words and images. The result: Anxiety and [depression](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/depression) decreases and the number of [unconscious](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/unconscious) negative thoughts decline. [9]

**The Power of Yes**

When doctors and therapists teach patients to turn negative thoughts and worries into positive affirmations, the communication process improves and the patient regains [self-control](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/self-control) and [confidence](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/confidence). [10] But there’s a problem: The brain barely responds to our positive words and thoughts. [11] They’re not a threat to our survival, so the brain doesn’t need to respond as rapidly as it does to negative thoughts and words. [12]

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**To overcome this neural**[**bias**](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/bias)**for negativity, we must repetitiously and consciously generate as many positive thoughts as we can.** Barbara Fredrickson, a founder of Positive Psychology, discovered that if we need to generate at least three positive thoughts and feelings for each expression of negativity. If you express fewer, personal and business relationships are likely to fail. This finding correlates with Marcial Losada’s research with corporate teams, [13] and John Gottman’s research with marital couples. [14]

Fredrickson, Losada, and Gottman realized that if you want your business or personal relationships to flourish, you’ll need to generate at least five positive messages for each negative utterance you make. (“I’m disappointed” or “That’s not what I had hoped for” count as expressions of negativity, as does a facial frown or nod of the head.)

**It doesn’t matter if your positive thoughts are irrational; they’ll still enhance your sense of happiness, well-being, and satisfaction**. [15] In fact, [positive thinking](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/positive-psychology) can help anyone build a better and more [optimistic](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/optimism) attitude toward life. [16]

**Positive words and thoughts propel the motivational centers of the brain into action [17] and help us build**[**resilience**](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/resilience) when we are faced with problems. [18] According to Sonja Lyubomirsky, a leading happiness researcher, if you want to develop lifelong satisfaction, you should regularly engage in positive thinking about yourself, share your happiest events with others, and savor every positive experience. [19]

Our advice: Choose your words wisely and speak them slowly. This will allow you to interrupt the brain’s propensity to be negative, and, as recent research has shown, **the mere repetition of positive words like love, peace, and compassion will turn on specific**[**genes**](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/genetics)**that lower your physical and emotional stress**. [20] You’ll feel better, live longer, and build deeper and more trusting relationships with others, at home and at work.

As Fredrickson and Losada point out, when you generate a minimum of five positive thoughts for each negative one, you’ll experience “an optimal range of human functioning.” [21] That is the power of Yes.

**For more, see**Words Can Change Your Brain**or visit**[MarkRobertWaldman.com](http://www.markrobertwaldman.com/)