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Jane is the author of *Wellbeing & Mindfulness*, *The Energy Secret*, *The Weekend Healer* and many other wellbeing titles. See her Amazon author page.

*Be brave*

## JANE ALEXANDER

Our holistic hero on setting healthy boundaries

*I've been the ultimate people pleaser all my life*, always trying to fit in, always being the good girl, the nice girl, the 'Yes' girl. Yet I recently discovered my 'No' at the most unlikely of places, a week-long Tantra workshop run by relationship expert, coach and *Natural Health* writer Jan Day ([janday.com](http://janday.com)).

The website promised that: "The aim of living tantra is to give you a space where you can learn and grow into celebrating your natural, healthy sexuality with ease, playfulness, tenderness, consciousness, integrity and joy." However, for me, it was far less about sexuality than about discovering where my boundaries lay.

I had worked myself up into a steam about what was going to happen. After all, this was a tantra workshop. Would I be expected to have sex with strangers? To walk around stark naked the whole week? As it turned out, it was all about choice. What feels good? What do I want to do? How do I want to feel?

There was a lot of touch and it was delicious. Working in groups of three or four, you learned to set out your boundaries very clearly, so you could then just relax and enjoy the experience. One woman stayed fully clothed and said she only wanted her ankles, wrists, face and hair touched. Meanwhile a man said he would love to be touched everywhere – but his helpers weren't willing to play ball (so to speak!). "Explore what feels good," said Jan. "Also accept that people may not want to touch you in the way you want. Be willing to hear 'no'."

I thought about how often I'm not authentic in my life. How my boundaries are poor to the point of non-existent. Even here, where I was repeatedly told to check in, to decide what felt right for me, I found myself worrying about what people would think, how they might judge me. It was time to change the record.

A man walked up to me and gently stroked my face. It felt delicious. "Yes," I said (to show I was happy with the contact). He hugged me tight and I realised that, actually, I wasn't feeling too comfortable any more. Usually politeness would have made me endure but the rules here were clear. "Stop," I said. He pulled back and looked a bit rueful. "Goodbye," I said (signifying the contact was over). I remembered all the times in my twenties when I slipped into liaisons because I didn't like to say no. If only I'd done this workshop way back then.

By the end of the week I felt like a completely different person. It had been tough, really tough, as I confronted childhood patterning and dissolved a shedload of old hurts and belief systems. Living tantra was, without doubt, the most challenging week of my life (and, believe me, I've had some challenging ones!) yet it was also one of the most rewarding. I left feeling confident enough in my 'no' that I am able to say a big fat YES to life. And that feels wildly liberating.

Jane's website is [exmoorjane.com](http://exmoorjane.com) and you can find her on Twitter or Instagram @exmoorjane