

When and How to Say “No” - Part 2

It is natural to want to say “Yes” to a child you love because you like to see him/her happy, but there are times when “No” is necessary. But there is a right way and a wrong way to say “No”. “James, I know you want to watch *Star Wars* tonight. I would like to say “Yes” but the answer is No. You know the TV rules in this house: No TV on school nights. When you are finished with your homework this evening I will play a game of ping-pong with you.” It is important to respond to a child’s feelings. “I know you want to. . .” Then suggest a substitute activity if possible.

Be sure you have a good reason for your “No”. Sometimes it is wise to say: “Let me think about it for a few minutes.” Many children these days have the “gimmie disease.” You’re walking through the supermarket and Larry spies some breakfast cereal he has seen advertised on TV. “Please, Mom, can we buy this cereal?” “Well, let’s look at the nutritional values.” “No, I am sorry. It is loaded with sugar and is more expensive than the cereal we have been using.” Children are bombarded with advertising, but as you shop, talk to them about values — nutrition and price. Talk about the importance of saving money and how to spend it wisely. And when they say, Give me this, Give me that — talk about how money is earned and how important it is to spend it wisely.

Dr. Kevin Leman says: “[G]o easy on the word no. I’m not saying to never use ‘no,’ but I am suggesting that you use it sparingly. You’d be surprised at how often you can change your natural inclination to say no by rephrasing your message to say: ‘That’s good, but why not try it this way?’ or ‘It would be better if we did this.’” *Bringing Up Kids Without Tearing Them Down*, p. 107.

“They’re constantly being sold on the idea that things will bring them happiness,” says Thomas Lickona, professor of education at the State University of New York at Cortland. “Parents can fend off the gimmies by creating a schedule of chores. Even four-year-olds can help clear breakfast dishes, feed the cat, water the plants, and so on. Older children can make beds, work in the garden and sort laundry.” *The Reader’s Digest*, March, 1999.

Avoid perfectionism. And remember the “firm but kind” rule. Set limits and stick to them. Use words like: “I am so sorry, but . . .”

Phrases to remember are: “It’s bed time now” rather than “You are too young to stay up any later.” Or, “TV time is over for today.” This is better than saying: “You have had enough TV for today.”

Dorothy tells about a time when she felt like reprimanding someone else’s child. She was shopping for shoes and a mother came in the shoe store with two girls, one about eight and the other about four. The older girl spied a pair of black patent leather shoes. “Mother, please buy this pair of party shoes for me.” “No, Shirley, you don’t need those shoes.” But Shirley begged and pleaded. Mother said, “No . . . No!” But Shirley whined and fussed for about ten minutes. Finally she said to the clerk, “I can’t stand this any longer. Get the shoes.” Shirley just grinned. She had learned a powerful lesson: *If I beg long enough and hard enough, I get what I want.* This lesson has far-reaching implications: If she makes people miserable enough, she gets her way.

“SOME ALTERNATIVES TO ‘NO’”

1. Give Information:

CHILD: “May I go over to play with Mary now?” **Give the facts:** “Remember, your cousin will be

here in ten minutes.” With that information, a child would know there wasn’t enough time to go now.

2. Accept Feelings:

CHILD: (At the playground) “I want to play longer. Do we have to go home now?” **Accept his feelings:** “You have had a great time while here playing with your new friend.” (Taking him by the hand to go) “We’ll come back another day so you can again enjoy playing with Mark.” Sometimes there is less resistance when someone understands how you feel.

3. Describe the Problem:

CHILD: Mom, I need a book from the library. Could you take me now? **Describe the problem:** “Yes, I’ll be glad to take you, but the bread has to finish baking first—in about twenty minutes.” (Some concepts taken from Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish, *How To Talk So Your Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk*, pp. 160, 161.)

“Wherever it seems necessary to deny the wishes or oppose the will of a child, he should be seriously impressed with the thought that this is not done for the gratification of the parents, or to indulge arbitrary authority, but for his own good. . . . Youth who follow their own impulse and inclination can have no real happiness in this life, and in the end will lose eternal life. . . . You are to represent God’s disposition. . . . You are to be full of compassion that your children will be drawn to you. Be pleasant in the home. Restrain every word that would arouse unholy temper. ‘Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath,’ is a divine injunction. Remember that your children are young in years and experience. In controlling and disciplining them, be firm, but kind. Children do not always discern right from wrong, and when they do wrong, they are often treated harshly, instead of being kindly instructed.” *Child Guidance*, pp. 258, 259.