

When and How to Say “No” - Part 1

“Mom, I want a new pair of roller skates.” “But, what’s wrong with the pair you have?” asked Sammy’s mother. “I want roller blades. I can’t go fast enough in these old fashioned skates. I want you to get them now!” “But, Sammy, I’m tired. We just got back from your riding lesson and it will soon be time for dinner.” “But, Mom, I need them NOW.” With that he stamped his feet. After a while Mother gave in to Sammy and took him to the mall to buy a pair of roller blades. Why was Sammy’s mother so easily manipulated? Part of the problem was she was carrying a deep feeling of guilt over a recent divorce. She felt that Sammy was deprived so she was trying to provide him with every advantage possible. Sammy sensed this attitude and he took advantage of his mother time and time again.

When should parents say “No”? When the request is unreasonable, when the request costs money beyond the family’s financial ability, when the request is for whimsical reasons. If Sammy’s mother gives in to him out of guilt feelings, she will become his slave. Rudolf Dreikurs, M.D. says, “Feeling obligated to please a child as much as possible is a mistake, because it is a servile attitude that promotes self-centeredness in the child. . . . Our shortsightedness makes it difficult to see the long-term results of yielding to the child’s every whim, since pleasing him usually brings temporary harmony to the home. . . Children need to learn how to manage frustrations. Adult life is full of them. It is sheer nonsense to assume that the child be able to meet frustrations when he is older.” *Children: The Challenge*, p. 177.

If Sammy grows up believing he can get his own way if he puts up a big enough fuss, he will be handicapped for life. As an adult he will manipulate everyone he can. Naturally, we love our children and want to make them happy, but we must remember that order in the home is of much greater importance.

“Mother, can I go to a party tonight at Jean’s house? I have a written invitation.” “I’m sorry, Nancy, this is a school night and our rule is no entertainment outside of the home on school nights. You have homework to do, remember?” “But, Mom, all of my friends will be there. Please, please, just this once!” After much pleading, Mother reconsidered. She hated to deny Nancy things that meant so much to her. “All right, just this once, but never again.” (*If I don’t let her go she will be so ugly I can’t live with her.*) Saying “No” is not easy, but it is sometimes absolutely necessary to have any kind of ordered family life. Nancy had a history of using “just this once” but her mother hadn’t caught onto it yet.

Children need to learn to respect household regulations. This is part of life’s discipline.

But the way we say “No” is very important! Saying “No” in a kind, but firm voice, helps the child to accept the denial. “Nancy, I know you want to go to this party and be with your friends. I would like very much to please you, but I cannot allow you to go in good conscience. I will allow you to watch a TV special tonight on Birds. This will provide information and background for your science class.” It is a good idea when you must say “No” to provide an alternative activity that is pleasing. This demonstrates to the child that his or her happiness is important to you.

It also helps to give children as many choices as possible. Let’s say you are shopping at the mall for a new sweater. You select three attractive sweaters in the right price range and say, “Nancy, here are three sweaters that are very attractive and are priced right. You make the choice, and I will buy it.” Children form ideas about money and shopping at a very young age. In their immaturity they see many things that they want and you are forced to say “No.” Impulse-buying sends the wrong message to children. Handling money is a very important skill that every child should learn. “Habits of economy, industry, and sobriety are . . . a better portion for you and your children than a rich dowery.” *Child Guidance*, p. 134.

Starting at about six years of age, it is wise to give your children an allowance. Explain that money is earned. “Jimmy, Daddy earned this money and he is sharing some with you so you can learn to spend it wisely.” When the children are young it is time to teach them good stewardship principles. Show them how to pay tithe and give offerings.

Mother and Laura were shopping for groceries at the super market. Laura saw the candy counter and picked up some candy saying, “Mamma, can we buy this candy? It’s my favorite kind.” “I’m sorry, Laura, we have plenty of candy at home so we don’t need any today.” Laura scowled and said, “You never buy anything for me.” “Come on, Laura, let’s find some fruit that you like and I’ll be glad to buy it for you.” Laura soon got over her disappointment about the candy. Laura’s mother demonstrated that she really wanted to please her.

“Fathers and mothers . . . in controlling and disciplining [your children], be firm, but kind. . . . Express your appreciation of the efforts they put forth to restrain their inclinations to do wrong. . . . Praise the children when they do well. . . . Excessive indulgence and undue severity are alike to be avoided.” *Child Guidance*, pp. 259, 261, 260, 263.