



# How to Say No



## THE CHALLENGE

Your child simply will not take no for an answer. Whenever you say the word, his\* unruly response tests your patience to the limit. Nothing you do or say calms him, and eventually you feel that you have no choice but to give in. Once again, your resolute no turns into an exasperated, reluctant yes.

You *can* stop that tiresome pattern. First, though, consider some factors about saying no.

\* For simplicity, we refer to the child in the masculine gender. However, the principles discussed apply to both boys and girls.

## WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

**Saying no is not cruel.** Some parents would disagree, perhaps saying that you should reason with your child, explain yourself, or even negotiate. But avoid saying no, they urge, for fear that it will make your child feel resentful.

True, the word “no” might initially disappoint your child. Nevertheless, it teaches him a vital lesson—that in the real world, there are limits by which people must abide. By giving in, on the other hand, you weaken your authority and teach your child to manipulate you by whining every time he wants something. Over time, your response could make him resentful. After all, how much can a child respect an easily manipulated parent?

**Your saying no prepares a child for adolescence and adulthood.** It teaches him the benefits of self-denial. A child who learns that valuable lesson is less likely to give in during adolescence when he faces pressure to take drugs or to have premarital sex.

Your saying no also trains a child for adulthood. “The truth is, we [adults] don’t always get what we want,” writes Dr. David Walsh. “We’re not doing our kids any favors when we teach them that the world will always serve up whatever they want on a silver platter.”\*

\* From the book *No: Why Kids—of All Ages—Need to Hear It and Ways Parents Can Say It.*



## WHAT YOU CAN DO

**Focus on your goal.** You want your child to become a competent, emotionally mature, successful adult. But you work against that objective if you give him everything he asks for. The Bible says that if someone “is pampered from his youth, he will become thankless later on.” (Proverbs 29:21) Saying no, therefore, is part of effective discipline. Such training will help your child, not hurt him.—*Bible principle: Proverbs 19:18.*

**When you say no, be decisive.** Your child is not your equal. So there is no need to debate your no as if you need him to approve it. Of course, as children grow, they need to have their “powers of discernment trained to distinguish both right and wrong.” (Hebrews 5:14) So it

## Do not say no just to flex your parental muscle

is not wrong to reason with a child. Nevertheless, do not get entangled in endless disputes with younger children about *why* you said no. The more you dispute with your child, the more your no will sound like a question rather than a decision.—*Bible principle: Ephesians 6:1.*

**Stick to your decision.** Your child might test your resolve with whining or pleading. If that happens at home, what can you do? “Separate yourself from the child,” recommends the book *Loving Without Spoiling*. “Say, ‘If you’re in a whiny mood, that’s OK, but I don’t want to hear it. You need to go to your room. You can whine there until you are ready to stop.’” At first, such a firm stance might be difficult for you to take—and for your child to accept. But his resistance is likely to lessen as he realizes that you mean what you say.—*Bible principle: James 5:12.*

**Be reasonable.** Do not say no just to flex your parental muscle. Instead, “let your reasonableness become known.” (Philippians 4:5) There are times when you can say yes to your child—as long as you are not giving in to mere whining and your child’s request is legitimate.—*Bible principle: Colossians 3:21.* ■

## KEY SCRIPTURES

“Discipline your son while there is hope.”—Proverbs 19:18.

“Children, be obedient to your parents.”—Ephesians 6:1.

“Let your ‘Yes’ mean yes and your ‘No,’ no.”—James 5:12.

“Do not be exasperating your children, so that they do not become downhearted.”  
—Colossians 3:21.

## THE VALUE OF SAYING NO

“It’s human nature for us to want to keep our kids smiling and cheerful. But you know what? If our kids never get mad at us, or get frustrated or become disappointed, that might be a warning sign that we aren’t doing our job as parents. How will your kids learn to deal with frustration and disappointment if they never have any practice? How will your kids learn self-discipline if you don’t teach them? It is your job to teach these important life lessons by saying no.”—Dr. David Walsh.