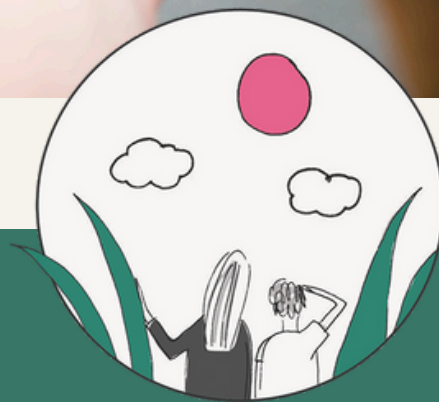


YOUR LOW DEMAND COMMUNICATION TOOLKIT



DR. **Naomi
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DO YOU HAVE A CHILD WHO JUST SAYS NO?



Some children say **NO** a lot. It doesn't matter what you suggest, you just get another **NO**. They even say **NO** to things that they enjoy, like trips to the park or ice cream. You worry that they're missing out, but you just don't know how to get past that **NO**.

The reason this happens is because some children are highly sensitive to pressure. They hear even a gentle suggestion as pressure. They feel under threat and understandably,

they respond by trying to make the pressure go away. The most effective way to do that is often with a **NO** and so that is what they do.

The **NO** is their protection, shielding them from whatever might come next. Sometimes that **NO** is said exactly like that - **NO!** - and sometimes it's an explosion. Sometimes it's more passive. They walk away. They stop talking. They hide.

Pushing past the **NO** doesn't help, because they push back harder. Rewards or punishments don't work, they don't seem to care. You try counting to three, and they count right back at you. You keep pushing and then they have a meltdown.

Pretty soon, your life is full of battles. Even when you try really really hard not to pick them. The harder you try to persuade your child, the less persuadable they become.

You (and your child) are stuck.

SO, WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Most parenting techniques work by putting children under pressure. to comply. Consequences, telling off, a firm voice, counting to three all add pressure. And for a child who responds to pressure with a **NO** - well, everything that you're trying just makes it worse.

WHAT CAN YOU DO INSTEAD?

You can't pressure your child because that makes things worse.

You can, however, make it more likely that they don't feel so pressured. When they feel less pressured, their **NO** shield is less necessary, and they just might lower it a fraction. They might be able to peak over the top. It seems counter-intuitive, but by reducing the pressure, you can make it more possible for your child to really think about what you said, and therefore more able to say **YES**.

There are of course, no guarantees. Your child might still say **NO** - but there's more of a chance that this is a genuine **NO** (i.e., they really don't want to do what you are suggesting) rather than an automatic **NO** which is a protective response. They put up that **NO** shield before they have time to think, because protecting themselves from the threat is the most important thing.

The way to change things around?

You need to become aware of the pressure you are putting on your child and make a deliberate choice to do something different. We put pressure on our children in many different ways. Some are obvious and some are more subtle. As you experiment with this, you'll notice the ways in which your child responds to subtle and less subtle pressure.

They might also tell you!



THREE STEPS TO HELP YOUR CHILD GET BEYOND THE NO!

1. Turn down the Pressure

2. You Can Choose

3. The Escape Hatch

TURN DOWN THE PRESSURE

Try reducing the pressure in the everyday things that you say.

Instead of emphasising how important things are, try instead downplaying the importance. This feels really strange at first, but it can make a huge difference. Whenever you find yourself trying to push a bit harder, just keep quiet. Some parents find it helps to imagine themselves zipping their mouth closed!

HIDDEN PRESSURE

- Emotional pressure (You'll make me so disappointed if you...).
- Rewards (if you do this then you can have an ice cream).
- Threats (You need to get here now or you'll miss your supper).
- Urgency (Come here this minute!).
- Too many choices (You could have Smarties or Skittles or a Milky Way).
- Blame and shame (You broke that cup, why can't you be more careful?).
- Making it about them (Do you really want to leave already? But we only just got here!).

TURN IT DOWN

- No emotional pressure (I can be happy whatever you choose to do).
- Unconditional treats (You can have an ice cream).
- Declarative language (There's food on the table).
- Non-urgent. (When you're ready we can leave).
- One choice at a time (How about Smarties?).
- No blame and no shame (Everyone breaks things. We have other cups).
- Make it about you (It's pretty busy here, I'm ready to leave when you want).

YOU CAN CHOOSE

Sometimes parents have been told that they have to show their child who's the boss, and make sure that they don't give them the impression that they have any choice about the situation. With children who are sensitive to pressure, this backfires spectacularly. The more you try to show them they have no choice, the more they show you that you are wrong about that. Adding a choice is a quick hack to lift the pressure off a difficult situation. Even when it feels unnatural to do so, if you can think of some way in which they can make a (real) choice, then it will be easier for them think without feeling so pressured.

- You could do this – but you don't have to.
- It might be fun to go out, but it might not be.
- You probably won't want to do this, but we do have the option of...
- When you're ready we can go or we could stay here instead.
- There's some food over there but you don't need to eat it.
- I think I might go over there and see what is going on. You don't have to come.
- We need to go to the park for your sister, would you prefer to bring your tablet or a ballgame?
- I know you're not cold, I have your jersey here if you need it.
- We're going to the swimming pool. You can choose whether to swim or whether to sit by the side and watch.
- Is it a good time to finish playing your game now, or is a better time coming up?

THE ESCAPE HATCH

Some children really need to know that they can say **NO** before they can risk considering a **YES**. When they feel that there is no way out, they panic and act to protect themselves by saying **NO!** As a parent, building in an escape hatch is a big mindset shift. Effectively it involves telling your child that they can leave, or planning how they can leave, before you've even agreed that you're going.

NO ESCAPE

- We're all going to the cinema.
- There's a really fun festival happening at the park, come on!
- Come on, try this new biscuit I baked for you. It's delicious!
- If you lick it, you have to eat it because otherwise it's a waste.
- Our friends are coming round and we're all going to eat lunch together. I'm not sure when they're leaving.

ESCAPE HATCH

- I was thinking about seeing a film. We could sit at the end of a row and leave if it's no good.
- There is a festival at the park. We could walk past and come home if it looks boring.
- There's a biscuit here just in case you want to try it. If you give me some feedback I can improve it next time.
- You can just lick it to see what it's like. You don't have to eat it.
- Our friends are coming round and if you want to eat lunch on your own, that's fine. They'll be leaving around two. and nothing else is planned.



Then you need to follow through with allowing them to use the escape hatch!

They need to trust that the escape hatch is really there. and that you really mean it.

This won't happen overnight.

If you've said that they don't have to go swimming but can watch instead, then don't make them go swimming when you get to the pool.

If you've said that you'll leave when they've had enough, let them tell you when that is.

Don't try to persuade them that perhaps they can manage 'just a bit longer'.

You want them to learn that they can rely on you to listen when they need to leave, so that they can feel confident enough to challenge themselves and try something new.

At first, that might mean a few trips where you leave abruptly. I've worked with families where the first few times they left the house, they only made it to the car, and then the car park. It's all progress.

If you have two adults available, that makes it easier to leave with one child whilst allowing the others to stay.

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A QUICK RECAP

Some children say No to almost everything. The more their parents try to change this, the worse things get. These children are often sensitive to pressure, and so conventional parenting techniques which use pressure are doomed to failure. They react to pressure as if it's a threat and they say **NO** to protect themselves.

The alternative is to deliberately lower the pressure in how we interact with our children. Don't try to persuade them or push them. Don't try to motivate them with rewards or tell them that they have no choice. Build in an escape hatch or 'get-out clause'.

This way they will no longer feel under threat and will start to peek over their protective shield in order to see (and ultimately explore) the world.

The catch? This doesn't mean that they will start to say **YES** to everything. That isn't actually the goal. The hope is that they will be able to think about their responses and make a decision which isn't based on avoiding threat.

That might mean a YES or a NO.

The important thing is that they were able to decide for themselves.



MEET NAOMI FISHER

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Naomi is a clinical psychologist, EMDR-Europe Accredited trainer and author. Since she was a small child, she has asked the world why. Why do things have to be this way – and what would it be like if it were different?

She applies this to education, parenting and clinical psychology. She asks whether school is always the best way for children to learn, and whether the things ‘we all know’ to be true about parenting are in fact the case. She pushes for new ways to understand difference and to include voices which go unheard. Her work brings psychological theory and evidence-based practice together with real life clinical experience and open curiosity. The thread that ties her work together is her willingness to take a step outside the conventional and to challenge the status quo, even when others disagree.

Naomi supports parents each month with live-taught webinars, bitesize online courses and a range of free resources.

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