

Did You Know?

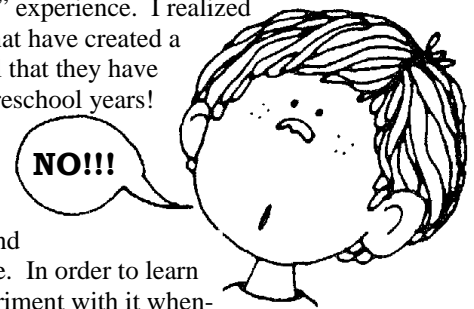
Dealing with Temper Tantrums

When Kids say "NO!"

The toddler/preschool stage is vastly more important than I ever realized when my children were going through it at the time. Children need to learn to say "no" because it's a valuable life skill. I knew that my children were going through normal and healthy stages of development when they continually resisted and wanted to do it their own way, but I couldn't help feeling that it would be wonderful if they could just skip this stage entirely. It was all so agonizing, especially the tantrums in public places! I just wanted to run and hide.

Think Of Saying "No" As Training For Teenage Challenges

When my children became teenagers, I looked at their stage of development with different eyes and a new perspective. I suddenly WANTED them to be able to say "no." In all the potentially dangerous situations they encountered each day, I wanted them to have the courage to say no and still feel their friends would like them. I wanted them to believe that being different was OK, not the mark of shame. I wanted them to be able to have a firm sense of right and wrong, a conscience that reminded them to act on principles and values that they held true. I hoped that they would be able to delay the need for the "instant fix" or the immediate pleasure in favor of the greater good. I hoped that they would learn to be responsible in their choices. It was at this point, that I had an "Ah ha" experience. I realized that the ability to make choices and say no requires *early* learning experiences that have created a mental framework that is already securely in place. Adolescents need a life-skill that they have practiced over and over again. How and when do they do this? In the toddler/preschool years! That's when they're developing their independent sense of self.



The Ability To Oppose Someone Else's Will Is A Complex Skill

It involves grasping the essence of an action, figuring out the logical opposite, and then acting out the opposite--all in the total absence of any role models to imitate. In order to learn this valuable skill, children need to perform it in a variety of situations and experiment with it when-ever they can. Once the skill of saying no is fully mastered, children will outgrow the need to do it all the time, just as they outgrow the need to climb every stair in sight. The skill will then be available for times when it is really needed. This doesn't mean they won't need to keep on testing the boundaries. That's their job as kids. But they won't need to do it so constantly.

How can we allow our children feel good about saying "no"?

- We can avoid punishing and rejecting them when they oppose us. Our kids actually *need* to be standing up to us for practice!
- We can stay in charge without attacking back with our anger.
- We can keep our "cool" and remember that we are not the target! We are simply the safest person available for them to practice this valuable skill.
- We can remember that temper tantrums trigger our *own* feelings of powerlessness in the situation. Which one of us hasn't felt that red-faced helplessness in the middle of a grocery store tantrum?
- We can share our feelings with a friend--not take our irritation out on our child.

Tell Yourself...
"Stay calm.
I can survive this!!
I survived labor. I can survive
this temper tantrum!"

We can prevent power struggles by:

- Modeling: teaching children by the way we handle our anger/frustration
- Giving children choices wherever we can
- Using humor and games to elicit cooperation
- Setting clear rules and expectations
- Letting kids know the consequences ahead of time
- Explaining the reasons for our requests and restrictions

Young Children Can Handle Only Two Choices:

“Do you want to do it?”
Or...
“Do you want me to do it?”

Sometimes,
power struggles
can't be prevented
and we just
need to ACT!

We can handle temper tantrums by:

- Remaining calm and staying in charge
- Ignoring when possible
- Removing the child to an isolated place (and allowing the tantrum to run its course)
- Restraining a child who is endangering himself, you, or another person
- Staying firm but loving
- Praising a child when he regains self-control

STOP RESISTANCE – GIVE CHOICES!

Children love having the privilege of choice. It takes the pressure out of the request and allows a child to feel in control, which helps him or her be more willing to comply. This is a very powerful tool that can be used effectively with toddlers through teenagers. Remember, though, young children can handle two choices only: “Do you want to do it...do you want me to do it?” As children get older, we can offer them more choices.

Remember these key ideas:

BE SPECIFIC. If you ask your child what she wants to wear and she picks out a party dress, you're in for a battle. Instead, offer choices of options that are good for both of you: “Do you want to wear the blue pants or the green shorts? Your sweatshirt or your jacket?”

If I'm to grow
I cannot always say “yes.”
I have to try out “no”
whether I mean it or not
to see if I can differ
just a bit
from you
and still feel sure you love me.
My “no”
is not just naughtiness—
it's growth!

– Ruth Reardon

USE TIME AS A CHOICE. Often, there is only one acceptable option. You can then use TIME and SEQUENCE as the choice. “What do you do first, put away your books or clean up your toys?” or “Now or in 10 minutes?”

IF A CHILD WON'T CHOOSE, OFFER A CHOICE. It does work! Say: “Do you want to choose, or shall I choose for you?” If your child gets stubborn, you can say, “I see you want me to choose.” Then, FOLLOW THROUGH! For example, if you are trying to get your preschooler out the door in the morning, and you ask, “Shoes or sneakers?” and she doesn't want to choose, you decide and put them on for her, without nagging or yelling!

YOU ARE DOING YOUR CHILD A FAVOR. When you get in the habit of offering choices many times each day, you are doing your child a big favor. As children learn to make simple choices (“milk or juice?”), they get the practice required to make bigger choices (“save or spend?”), which gives them the ability to make even bigger, more important decisions (“beer or soda?”).

GIVING A CHOICE ENDS MANY POWER STRUGGLES. Giving your child a choice is a peaceful way to encourage his cooperation while avoiding the power struggles that so often erupt when a parent gives an order. When a child chooses his own plan of action he is more likely to follow through with a pleasant attitude, and learn decision-making skills that he will carry with him into adulthood.

...So, do you want to start offering choices today... or tomorrow???
