**No Means No**

|  |
| --- |
| Have you fallen into the habit of over-explaining and over-negotiating with your kids? If so, it's likely that every time your child wants to challenge your authority, decision, or rule, you keep talking to him in order to get him to understand why you've made the rule in the first place. And often as your child gets older, you'll find yourself compromising some more and changing the rules a little more. Understand that what you're really doing is training your child not to accept the rules. Don't forget, if you tell your child "No, you can't do that now," and he keeps bugging you-and then you end up giving in and letting him do it-you've just trained him not to listen to you. |

Let's look at the reverse. If you wanted to train your child how to not accept no for an answer, how would you do it? First, when you said "no," you'd encourage your child to keep challenging your authority, the consequences they've been given, or the responsibilities they have. You would also keep explaining your reasons to your child over and over. Then at some point, you'd give in and reward him with a bit (or all) of what he's asking for. So you can see that many parents are training their children to challenge them without even knowing it.

So what should you do when you set limits and your child gets angry? I think it's important to define what setting limits means: in my opinion, it could mean anything from establishing a curfew, to saying the TV goes off at eight o'clock. In effect, your child experiences those limits as being told "no". Some kids get angry when they're told no, and they manage that anger by demanding an explanation from their parents. They might say, "It's not fair," and start to act up-they take it out on you.

Things can often escalate into a shouting match. If you're screaming at your child (and by the way I understand how easily that can happen) as far as he's concerned, you're on the same level as he is. You negate your own authority by yelling. Certainly, the first time you yell, your child might respond the way you want him to-and maybe even the second time. In fact, the first ten times he might respond. But the day is going to come where he just screams back at you. This keeps escalating until he breaks something or kicks the wall. In my opinion, getting into a shouting match usually doesn't work, because your child just learns more aggressive ways to respond to you.

If a parent tells me their child won't take "no" for an answer, my response to them is always, "If you reward that kind of behavior, then your "no" doesn't really mean "no". It means "keep trying."
 **Establish Your Authority Early On**

How can you stop all the over-negotiating and over-explaining as a parent, and let your child know that you mean what you say? The longer that you put that off, the harder it's going to get. Parents have to establish their authority very early in life by setting limits and having a structure. For example, you don't let your two-year-old walk by the street; you don't let your three-year-old go out by the pool. You just have those limits and enforce them. This establishes the structure you will use as a parent for the rest of their childhood.

**When Kids Get Over-Stimulated**

Don't forget, sometimes kids get over-stimulated and when that happens, it's very hard for them to respond to a direction. And so parents have to keep that in mind. If kids are over stimulated and get carried away, take them to their room and have a little seat where they can sit, have them take a break for five minutes. That will allow them to recover from the over-stimulation. Then you can talk with them simply and firmly about what the boundaries are. And ask them if they can do it. If they can, then they can go out of the room. If they can't, then they have to stay in for a few more minutes, until they agree to comply. If your child gets over-stimulated in a store, you can do the same thing by using your car as the calm down area.

**Don't Let them Turn You Around**

I believe the best thing you can do when your child is arguing with your rules or consequence is to say "No, I'm not going to discuss this any further," and turn around and walk away. Don't respond to any backtalk. So if you say no and your child starts saying, "But, but, but?" just keep walking. Leave him holding the bag. If you give him the power to turn you back around, he's going to turn you back around forever. I think kids do need a reasonable amount of explanation, but after you've done that, you don't owe them anything more. It's not productive.

**Tell Your Child the New Rules**

The time to explain concepts to your child is when things are going smoothly. So when things are good, sit down and say to your child, "When I tell you "no," I don't want to talk to you anymore about that. No means no." You can help coach them if the word no is particularly frustrating to your child. "If you don't like no, if that makes you frustrated, go to your room and draw for five minutes. Go do something to calm yourself down." That should start very early. Let me be clear: If you give in to temper tantrums from kids who are two and three and four years old, you're training them to challenge your authority. You're training them not to give in to you, because they know you'll give in to them. They'll use the same tactics whenever you challenge them. And remember, if it works in childhood, they'll use it as adults and it will lead to a lot of difficulty in their relationships.

**Always Remember These 3 Parenting Roles: Teacher, Coach and Limit Setter**

Always remember these three roles of parenting: the Teaching Role, the Coaching Role and the Limit Setting Role. The Limit Setting Role is an important part of your parenting style. Parents will often tell me they don't like to set limits; these are the same parents who tell me they want to be friends with their kids. I understand that, and I'm not judging them. But I also think that that's a misconception of what the parent-child relationship should be and can be in the early years-and even on into the teen years. My son didn't need friends. He needed a parent to say, "No, you can't stay out after ten o'clock on Friday night unless I know where you're going to be." Personally, I think the parent-child relationship is lifelong and complex. If your child is going to be friends with you, that probably won't happen until they're adults.

By the way, even though I don't advocate being your child's friend, I think you should be friendly with your kids at all times. That's that "positive regard" I often mention. And what that means is that you should always talk to your kids like you like them. Have a look on your face and a tone that gives them the message that you care about them. I know this can be hard, especially when you're frustrated and your child has been acting like a pill. Still, it's very important to be positive when dealing with them as much as you can, because they pick up on any negative feelings very, very quickly and soon internalize them--or rebel against them aggressively.

Parents have to be clear and honest with themselves about the reality of the situation if they have nurtured this "never take no for an answer" problem in their kids. If your child is pushing back when you say no, understand that up until now, you've watered and fed that behavior, and it grew. So to expect this behavior to change without any conflict is unrealistic. I believe you need to set limits and stick to them, while remembering that your child is not going to turn around their behavior in one day. If you're only starting when he's 15, remember that you've trained your child that you're a pushover and that you don't mean what you say. Once you inadvertently train your kids to believe that, it's very hard to break that training.

These are hard patterns to turn around, but parents can do it. You have to come up with a game plan. That game plan should include what you're going to do, how you want your child to act in any given situation, how to teach them to do it, how to respond to them if they get so overwhelmed they can't do it, and how to set limits on that behavior. In my opinion, these are some of the basics of sound parenting.

Realize that this fight might take you six months or six years. But unless your child has some severe behavioral disorder, eventually most kids will turn around and start responding -that's all there is to it.