



“No No No!!” Handling the “Nos” of Toddlerhood

As toddlers grow more independent and more verbal, “No” becomes a very useful word. It is easy to learn (they hear it a lot!), it helps toddlers declare their independence, and it gets attention. Toddlers begin to use “No” for just about any situation. They can even say “No” to something they really want! This toddler negativism is very normal for toddlers, but it can be very frustrating for parents. As toddlers grow more mobile and independent, parents may discover that in their attempts to set limits, they are saying “No” almost as often as the toddler. When toddlers and parents get into this “No” spiral, it can lead to interactions that are upsetting to both parent and child.

How can parents avoid the “No” spiral?

- Give your child some control. Toddlers need to assert their growing independence by having some control in their world. What can your toddler be in charge of? Can she choose the game or the toys, or help choose the clothes she wears?
- Let your child say no. When is it OK for your child to say “No”? “No” is an important word for children to be able to say. It helps them feel in control and competent and may keep them safe.
- Pick your “No” battles. Limit your “No”s to the most important rules, like those about safety and interacting with others. Try to use limit-setting techniques like distraction or choices, instead of saying “No.”
- Don’t give your child the opportunity to say “No” if it is not an option. Offer choices. Instead of saying “Do you want to get dressed?”, say, “Do you want to wear the red or green shirt?” Give your child choices that are safe and healthy. Control the choices so they are manageable for your toddler. Try giving your toddler just two choices to pick from.
- No means no. If you say no to your toddler, follow through with your limit. When you say “No” to climbing on the chair, don’t give in to your child or ignore it when your child does it anyway. Toddlers can learn very quickly that “No” doesn’t really mean no.
- Respect your toddler’s “No”s. Don’t laugh at your toddler’s attempts at independence. It is an important step in developing self-esteem. Help your child feel competent and confident by respecting her attempts.

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