



Celebrate Your Toddler's "No!"

By Judy Arnall, BA, CCFE

I walked into the kitchen and discovered my two-year-old blonde haired daughter, dressed in her little pink fleece sleeper with the padded feet, standing on top of the chair next to the counter. She was preoccupied with dipping her fingers into the butter bowl and then into the sugar bowl before they headed into her waiting mouth. When she saw me enter the kitchen, a potential threat to her wonderful activity, she formed a very concise pointed finger at me, and firmly delivered "NO!" at my astonished expression.

"NO!" It's probably the most commonly used word in toddlerhood! It flies out of our children's mouths before they even have time to really think about what they are saying "no" to.

When my five children were young, they were allowed to say "no" as much as they wanted to. I would always try to respect their "no" as much as I could within the parameters of the particular situation, and especially in circumstances such as when they didn't want to be tickled by me, or didn't want to hear me sing, or didn't want to be kissed by Grandma or didn't want to share their prized possessions. I think "no" is an important word for asserting their feelings and desires and unless it is a matter of safety, they have the right to have their opinion listened to and respected. Here is why children should be allowed to say "no":

I want my daughter to say "no" when she is three and her daddy might want to put her in the front seat and not the car seat because it is less hassle.

I want my daughter to say "no" when she is five and her little five-year-old friend might want her to cross a busy street without an adult.

I want my daughter to say "no" when she is nine and her Uncle might want to touch her in her private places.

I want my daughter to say "no" when she is twelve and her friends might want her to steal a candy bar from the grocery store.

I want my daughter to say "no" when she is fourteen and her friends might bully a fellow student.

I want my daughter to say "no" when she is fifteen and a friend's drunk parent might want to drive her home from a sleepover party.

I want my daughter to say "no" when she is sixteen and her boyfriend might want to show her how much he loves her.

I want my daughter to say “no” when she is eighteen and her buddies might want her to try some “crystal meth.”

So, when she is two-years-old, my daughter can practice saying “no” as much as she needs to. And I won’t take it personally.

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