

SAYING NO

BY CHIP DELORENZO, M.ED.

When I first started teaching I observed a young girl named Lauren approach her friend, Allison, and ask to use one of her new fancy pencils. Lauren queried in a very syrupy fashion, with lots of eye batting. I expected Allison to either say yes or give an explanation as to why not. Instead, Allison simply looked kindly at Lauren and said, “No.” Then.... silence. Lauren, didn't seem to know where to go, and said, “Oh,” and went off to find another pencil.

As adults, we often either say *no* too often or explain ourselves when we do. When all children hear is *no* then they become discouraged and engage in manipulation or power struggles. When adults don't feel comfortable saying *no* and give explanations every time they say *no* then children engage in arguments, power struggles or manipulation.

Ways to Avoid Over Using “No”

1. For younger children, prepare the home environment so that items that children shouldn't touch are out of reach.
2. Show children what to do vs. what not to do.
3. Take time for teaching (e.g. manners, routines, social skills, household chores)
4. Allow children to make their own mistakes and learn from them – check in later to process.
5. Use non-verbal communication (e.g. point, remind with your eyes and a smile, etc.)
6. Redirect younger children (5 and under) to a positive action or activity.

Ways to Avoid Explaining When Saying, “No”

1. Say, “I love you, but *no*.” (then... silence, like Allison).
2. Involve children in creating routines and ground rules (they're often firmer than adults), so the answer *no* becomes follow-through on a previous agreement.
3. Let routines be the boss, and involve children in the creation of those routines. When routines are consistent, then a child who pushes back and says, “I want to stay up and watch TV!” can be redirected with a simple, “No. It's bed time.” (then... silence).
4. Use the answer *no* as sparingly so that when you say *no* it's taken more seriously.
5. If you feel that a child truly doesn't understand your reasons for saying *no*, and stay firm – they don't have to agree with your reasons.
6. Be kind and firm at the same time.