

Helping You Navigate Your Journey Through Parenting

Saying “No” Respectfully



BY KIM DeMARCHI

With the busy holiday season upon us, it seems I'm bombarded with wonderful opportunities to participate in cookie exchanges, gift exchanges, canned food drives, jewelry parties and candle parties. I have ample opportunity to volunteer on community committees, in work groups, on fundraising campaigns, and of course, be the team parent on sports teams. It is never ending, I love to help, and I should be so fortunate. My problem is I simply have a hard time saying “no”. It's such a little word, but has such a big feeling attached to it for me personally.

So, I ask myself and ponder deeply, “Why is it so hard for me to say no?” I truly think it's because I wasn't allowed to say “no” directly to my parents when I was a child and teen. Most of us were probably raised to do as our parents told us, whether we liked it or not. However, children who aren't allowed

to say “no” directly, most definitely say it indirectly. Some children say it by dawdling, forgetting, or doing a job so ineffectively that you either have to finish it yourself or you don't bother to ask them again. Some children may even get sick or not feel well. Make no mistake... your child is saying “no”.

So why not allow our child to use honest, clear communication and just say “no”? That is a scary prospect for most parents! Let's be honest... we like to be in control. We like our children to do as we tell them to do. We don't like it when people say “no” to us, especially our children. But, think about the benefits for a child who can say “no”. She can say it to their peers who want her to participate in drugs, sex, stealing, vandalism, cheating, bullying, sneaking out, and any other situation where someone wishes to coerce her. But, if we don't teach our children to say “no”, who will?

Notice, I said TEACH, not just allow, but teach. We need to teach our children how to say “no” respectfully to us in our home. Respectfully is the operative word in that sentence. In our family, you are allowed to say “no”. We try to respect the desire of the person who says it. We also have an agreement that you need to be willing to negotiate. Additionally, sometimes you still need to do what is asked, despite the fact that you said “no” respectfully.

For example, I may ask my son to bring the garbage cans in from the curb when it's raining. He may say, “I don't want to go out in the rain. Can I do it in a couple of hours when I'm leaving for basketball and will have my jacket and shoes on already?” I may ask my daughter to come downstairs and set the table for dinner. She may say, “I'm right in the middle of my last few math problems and I really want to get it finished. Can I clear and load the dishes after dinner

instead?” Let's say we are getting ready to have guests over for dinner. I ask my son to please clean the downstairs bathroom. His response is, “No, I hate cleaning bathrooms!” Not exactly my definition of respectful, but who does enjoy cleaning bathrooms. I might say, “What would you be willing to do instead to help our family get the house ready?” He might say, “I'd be willing to vacuum the entire downstairs.” In that scenario, I'd happily say, “Done!” We both win!

As odd as it sounds, when parents allow their children to say “no”, they are more willing to cooperate. You have given them power in the situation and that makes them feel like they have some control. You will definitely lessen the number of power struggles in your home with this strategy.

One of the best ways to teach your child how to say “no” is to model saying it yourself. Your “no” may also be phrased as “I'm unwilling to....” or “I'm not willing to...” or “I'm willing to...”. Use a neutral tone of voice as you say it. You can sound firm but in a nonjudgmental way, without showing anger or disapproval. It is so important for parents to be comfortable with saying “no” without feeling guilty. It is vital to our children's safety and well-being for them to have parents who model this effectively. Children must learn from our example and be able to say “no” in their own lives when they are confronted with uncomfortable situations. But, they need practice saying “no”. Give them the gift of learning to say “no” respectfully now, so they can say it confidently later when it really counts!



So this brings me back full circle. I will say “no” to yet one more fundraiser. I will say “no” to attending one more party. I love this quote by Stephen Covey, “You have to decide what your highest priorities are and have the courage - pleasantly, smilingly, nonapologetically - to say “no” to things. And the way to do that is by having a bigger ‘yes’ burning inside.” My bigger yes is modeling for my children. Happy Holidays!

Kim DeMarchi, M.Ed., Certified Parent Educator and Certified Family Coach, is a Tualatin resident, married with 13 year old boy/girl twins, and has been an educator for more than two decades. Kim is trained and certified through the International Network for Children and Families in a program called Redirecting Children's Behavior, as well as in Positive Discipline by Jane Nelsen. Kim is active in supporting her local parenting community by providing monthly workshops at the community center. Kim is a weekly radio show host of parenting podcasts at Passport To Parenting: Helping Parents Navigate their Parenting Journey.



Kim's goal for you is to help reduce conflict, foster mutual respect, and create deeper communication and connections with your loved ones. She can be reached through www.EmpoweredParenting.com or www.PassportToParenting.com.