

# Discipline: Saying Yes / Telling your Child what TO DO

By Janelle Durham, MSW, Parent Educator, Bellevue College. GoodDaysWithKids.com, InventorsOfTomorrow.com

Many people think of discipline as just limits and consequences, and saying "no". We definitely want to set limits with our kids, and we absolutely need to say no sometimes (especially when safety is involved). But a huge part of discipline is saying yes and telling the child what they *can* do.

## **Ask for the behavior you want to see**

It's important to know that toddlers don't always understand the word "don't" very well, so if you say "don't bite", they hear the verb in that sentence, and continue to bite.

Also, even if they understand what they *shouldn't* do, they may not be able to think of an alternative for what they *should* do. So instead of "don't pour that on the floor", say "keep the rice in the dish."

Instead of "Don't drop that!!" say "Hold it very carefully." Instead of saying "Don't throw it!" say "when you're ready to set it down, I'll take it from you." Instead of "Don't Run", say "please walk."

## **Use specific language to explain what you want and why**

Instead of just "no", try "careful", "gentle", "soft touch", "slow feet." "Hands up, that's hot."

"I want you to stop banging on that, because it might break and that would make us sad."

## **Say what you are seeing and then say what you want to see**

"I see you dumping all the toys out of the box. I want to see you get out only the ones you want to play with." Or "I see you banging on grandma's piano. I want to see you play gently with one finger."

## **Give a bored child something to do**

If you're frustrated when he makes a mess while you're cooking: give him his own drawer in the kitchen. Fill it with plastic dishes, cups that stack, and pots to bang. Let him play in a sink full of water, or with dried beans for pouring and scooping. Ask for his "help" with what you're working on.

## **Create opportunities to say yes**

Create spaces where it's all about yes. Create a play area where everything is age appropriate, where it's easy for them to keep things tidy... Have times or activities each day where your child sets the agenda, and gets to play however she wants to, as loud (or quiet) as she wants to.

## **If not now, then when? If not here, then where?**

If they can't do it now, but it'll be ok later, can say "you can have a cookie later, after you eat lunch."

Or "it's not OK to climb on the furniture here, but later today we can go to the playground and climb."

## **Remove predictable problems**

If your child loves to throw, put away the hard plastic toys and metal cars for now. You'll still work with them on not throwing things that weren't designed to be thrown, but this lets you avoid injury.

If there's one environment, or playmate, or circumstance that always brings out the worst in your child, can you avoid it? Or take it on only when your child (and you) are rested, fed, and healthy?

## **Set your child up to succeed**

Schedule: When planning your day think about the natural rhythm of your child's day. When are they active and ready for engaging activity? When are they quiet but happy, and content to go along for some errands? If you need your child to sit still later in the day, can you make sure they get plenty of physical activity early in the day?

Make sure your child is well fed before taking her into any situation which will be challenging for her.

Predictable routines make everything more manageable. Think about areas where you have discipline challenges. How could you establish a new routine that reinforces the way you want them to behave?

## **More information:**

What to say instead of no: [www.regardingbaby.org/2011/11/05/what-to-say-instead-of-no-six-ways-to-gain-your-childs-co-operation/](http://www.regardingbaby.org/2011/11/05/what-to-say-instead-of-no-six-ways-to-gain-your-childs-co-operation/)

13 ways to encourage good behavior: <https://www.askdrsears.com/topics/parenting/discipline-behavior/good-behavior-toddlers>