

NO!

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Difficult

As toddlers start to refer to themselves as 'I' and not their name 'Johnny wants a drink' and then 'I want a drink,' there's a dawning: I am a separate person and may not agree with the choices made for me! The child's sense of self and mighty will is developing! It can be a celebration, 'terrific twos' as opposed to 'terrible twos', here are some background ideas to start:

Understand that 'no' can be an age and stage. I remember a funny cartoon; the picture was a two year old child being asked their name? The reply was 'No!' It does not matter the question, the answer will be 'No!' to a toddler (and teenager!).

For young children, keep a diary and highlight the times of day when a defiant 'No!' is voiced, it's interesting to see the pattern. Create positive family rhythms to make the daily tasks of meal times, rest times and bed times full of connection and greater fun. Ideas in my book, 'Turning Tears into Laughter: Creative Discipline for the Toddler and Preschool Year' will help (see note to end).

Parenting is an emotional bank account; make sure you place in many positive deposits for the trying times ahead, to stay connected. Connection creates greater power to transform behaviours.

Ask the question, 'Does the child have ample time to play in the day (play is the 'work' of childhood) and complete tasks for themselves; a hurried child will say 'No!' I want more time!

Give strong willed children tasks (little leadership roles), can you get the mail in your special postbag; help me chop the fruit for our plate etc. Extend their 'will' to be helpful, strong, and useful - to achieve tasks. In a word 'involve' your child.

Be conscious about food additives, there is growing evidence that some food additives lead to oppositional defiance tendencies!

Check how much control you are asking for (honestly, are you being an army sergeant, I know at times I am?) - Don't sweat the small stuff.

'No!' is in the air, what to do? A few simple tips to help:

Redirect: approach the child (touch to gain attention) and use the same key word, 'Listen...' (With a short explanation of what needs to be done and why). Repeat calmly, three times (stand your ground and repeat...) 'Stop, listen...' Your body language is saying 'I am not going away!'

Assist and teach by meeting the child half way. This provides a win-win situation. 'OK, I will put on one shoe and you can do the other'. 'I will pick up the toy cars and you can pick up the Lego.'

Always praise when the job is done, 'Great Listening - High Five!' Reinforce the key word 'Listen!' Praise again later in the day and share good news with loved ones. 'Johnny is a great listener; he tidied his toys straight away today.'

Use a game to help: 'You are a forklift and I will put the toys on your arms, press a button so you can drive them back to the shelf!' Imagination goes a long way with children. Play games with timers, 'Bet we cannot be ready before the oven timer rings for 5 minutes, ready steady go'. Children love to fly like jet planes to the car and not move like a snail!

Is an activity finishing soon? Give ample time for children to adjust. 'Five minutes and we will pack away', 'Two minutes and we finish playing to go to Kinder', 'One minute, one more thing to play with'. This tip helps with transition times

Defiance!

by Lou Harvey-Zahra

(leaving a play date, park or home play). Children are in the moment and find it hard to pack away when a game is gripping! Leave a note on the toy, 'Jenny will be back after Kinder, no one touch!'

Count down in a firm voice, 3, 2, 1... (I still use this in my classroom every day). If leaving a park etc, move on as if the child is following; keep a safe eye on your child always.

Choices (between two) can help during defiant moments, 'The jumper or your coat, your choice to be warm', if a refusal, limit the choice, 'your jumper or stay inside?' If an activity is not safe to a child or others, teach the appropriate way to behave, if ignored 'play safely or we leave, your choice'. Follow through...

Use empathy, 'I know you love to play diggers and it is hard to leave, you will play again before tea'. Explain what is coming up next and also when play can happen again. Also, use empathy for your own situation.' 'Help Mummy out, I need to be on time for the doctor, the doctor will be cross!' said in funny voice!

Use humour to break your child's mood and yours! Stamp your foot and exclaim 'whatever you do, do not put your coat on, do not!' Your child will be surprised if you say the opposite of what you have been asking for with a grin! Keep it light, say 'No' and stamp your own foot and then tickle and chase the job done!

Tell stories, the Little Red Hen is a great one, no farm animals will help with the wheat collecting, grinding and baking of the cake, but they all want to eat the cake, to which the hen replies, 'No, not a crumb! You did not help when asked to collect the wheat, grind the wheat or bake the cake, so you shall not eat the cake!'

1 Explain the natural consequences of not listening and listening. 'If we do not leave now, there will be no time to...' 'If toys are left on the floor, someone will step on, and break'; 'Share toys so everyone is happy or put up high to stop fights', not as a threat but as a natural consequence of actions. Explain simple emotions, 'Emily (kinder teacher), will be happy if everyone arrives on time she can start the day together, let's see her smile'.

2 What are our expectations - a few things a day (being on time for Kinder, packing away toys?), follow the tips above and stay calm, a quiet and firm voice is more powerful than shouting, bribing or pleading. Use threats sparingly, save for extreme situations, for the child's own safety. Threats and bribes used continually require increased management. The child builds resistance, as well as inner resentment. Empty threats encourage poor listening skills.

3 It is important to develop listening skills in our children. Listening skills require patient, firm and loving teaching, for children's overall development and our own sanity!



Lou Harvey-Zahra is a teacher with twenty years experience, playgroup leader and mother of two. Her book 'Turning Tears into Laughter: Creative Discipline for the Toddler Years' (\$12.95) is available from bookshops and libraries, or her website www.skiptomylouparenting.com. Lou runs regular parenting workshops in Melbourne and beyond (see her website for details).