4 Ways to Say ‘NO’ to Your Children that Make Sense
By David Benzel

“Because I said so!” never made sense to me as a child. I wanted to know the real reason – the “why” behind the NO. In the movie Matilda, Danny DeVito’s character describes the reason as, “Because I’m big, you’re little, I’m smart, you’re dumb.” My parents never took that route, but in view of the fact that I was a fairly compliant first-born, I thought a little more information would be helpful, or at least interesting.

It can be argued that kids need to accept the authority of those in the one-up position in life: parents, teachers, coaches, police officers, etc. I get that. There are times when the short answer should be enough when it comes to some of the mundane things of everyday life. “Feet off the furniture please.” “Elbows off the table please.” “Use a tissue please.”

But if all we desire is obedient and dependent kids who don’t exercise any kind of critical thinking, then “Because I said so” works, but only until rebellion kicks in. On the bigger issues that really matter, children want, and need, to be treated as if they have the mental capacity to understand the “why” of a parental decision. Their future decision-making depends on this, especially when we’re not around for guidance.

Here are four situations in which parents can stimulate thinking with a simple sentence that means “No”, but provides more meaning than an abrupt and mindless, “Because I said so.”

1. When a child wants to hang out with people, participate in an activity, or use a substance that does not align with your values or agree with your moral compass, say: “Our core values point us in a different direction than what you’re requesting.” When your children learn that the family’s values drive decisions, instead of needs or wants, it eventually becomes clear that you are honoring a deeply held belief, not just standing in the way of fun.
2. When your child wants to eat or drink unhealthy food/drink, consume unhealthy entertainment, or spend too much time on social media, say: “There are healthier choices for you to make in this area, and you’re welcome to choose one of those.” Children need choices, but not without limits. Knowing and respecting those boundaries teaches freedom and responsibility simultaneously.

3. When your child is lured or tempted by an opportunity that doesn’t seem safe to you, say: “The risk is too high for me to say yes to this.” Children underestimate the physical risks of certain situations. While we don’t want to create unnecessary fears in our children, it is our responsibility to guide them away from dangerous circumstances as infants, and all the way to young adulthood, i.e. steep stairs, busy streets, and political demonstrations in Venezuela.

4. When a child asks for something that costs too much, say: “Our financial resources are needed in other areas.” For younger children it would be, “We need our money to go toward other things right now.” Children need to learn about financial resources and the stewardship of those funds. Sometimes tough choices are required when it concerns our wallets.

If at this point you’re thinking, “Sounds good, but my kid won’t accept any of this as an answer.” That’s okay! In using this approach you’ve done your part. The moaning and groaning and everything else you hear afterwards is just “white noise” according to parent-coach Susan Mosley. You’ve sent a rational reply with a character lesson built in. It will be meaningful to your children at the right time. Just stay consistent and unemotional about it. Eventually, respectful answers earn respectful acceptance.

In each of the scenarios above, I’ve provided you with a simple alternative to “No, because I said so.” Long explanations are not necessary, but a rational position – even if opposed – is still rational. Your kids will appreciate your calm delivery and solid commitment to meeting their highest priority needs, not their wants.

CLICK HERE to ask David Benzel a question about this topic: http://www.growingchampionsforlife.com/coachdavid

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