

Say Yes

By Natasha Dansie

Do you remember the first word your child spoke? For many children, one of the very first words they speak is “NO!” One of the likely reasons for this is because it is a word they hear so often. “No, no, no,” we gently chide as babies crawl toward something forbidden or put something dangerous in their mouths. As parents know all too well, children repeat what they hear and before we know it, our babies are saying, “no” back to us.

What might happen if children heard “yes” more often than they heard “no”? Could one little word really make that much difference? When children hear positive words more often than negative ones, it increases cooperation and decreases resentment. Increasing the number of positive interactions with children strengthens relationships and reduces contention. Consider trying these simple tips to say “yes” more often:

- When your child calls for you, respond with “yes?” rather than “what?” A soft-toned, questioning “yes” indicates an availability and desire to help or assist. If your children consistently hear you respond with “yes?” when they need you, the chances of your children responding positively when you need them will increase.
- Answer “yes” as often as possible when your child has a request. Rather than saying, “no!” when your child requests ice cream before dinner, consider saying, “Yes, you can have ice cream after dinner.” Similarly, when your child asks to play with a friend right after school it is easy to respond with, “No! You have to do your homework first.” Instead, try saying, “Yes, you can play with friends as soon as your homework is done.” This technique works with all kinds of requests from children of all ages.
 - “Can I have \$20 for the weekend?”
 - “Yes! I have several extra jobs that you can do to earn \$20.”
 - “Can I go to the concert with my friends?”
 - “Yes, as long as a parent is going with you.”
 - “Can I get build a giant fort with all the pillows and blankets?”
 - “Yes, as long as they are all folded and cleaned up before dinner time.”
 - “Can I check out of school early to go to the activity?”
 - “Yes, as soon as you have all of your assignments turned in.”
 - “Can I get the new Xbox?”
 - “Yes, I will pay half and you can earn the money to pay for the other half.”
- Make “yes” your default. Oftentimes as parents, we get so tired, frustrated, distracted, or worn out that regardless of the nature of the request coming from our child, we default to “no” just so we don’t have to deal with one more thing. Sometimes we even find ourselves saying “no” to perfectly reasonable requests for no reason at all. “No” is just our default answer. This happens when the perpetual negativity of our society starts to permeate our parenting. Conscientiously consider making “yes” your default answer. If the answer has to be no, that’s ok sometimes.

But in the cases where the answer can be yes, be cautious about letting “no” be the first thing you say.

As we deliberately say “yes” more often, positivity will increase in our homes and in our relationships. When our children hear “yes” more than they hear “no” from us, it is likely that we will hear “yes” more often than we will hear “no” from them.

Free Healthy Relationships classes are provided through Healthy Relationships Utah and Utah State University Extension. For more information, visit HealthyRelationshipsUtah.org or contact Natasha Dansie at natasha.dansie@usu.edu.