

# Handy Handouts®

Free informational handouts for educators, parents, and students

## Say "Yes" to the "No" Phase

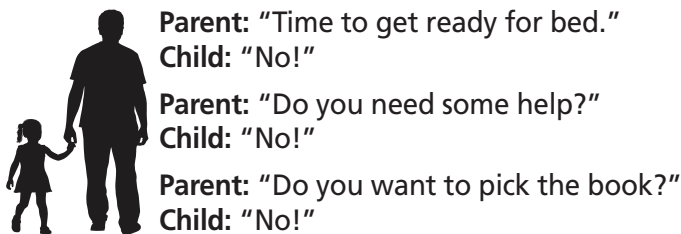
by Abby Sakovich, M.S., CCC-SLP



In addition to discovering the rules and limits of the social world, this "No!" phase is one way children establish their own limits. The ability to say "No" is at the cornerstone of every healthy relationship. It is imperative that children learn that saying "No" is the first step to establishing their personal boundaries with other people.

What can parents do to survive the "Terrible Twos" and complete day-to-day tasks such as getting dressed with sanity intact?

Between the ages of 18 and 36 months, a strange phenomenon occurs. Sweet, compliant toddlers may begin to meet every request with a strong and confident "No!" and conversations may sound a little like this:



Often called the "Terrible Twos," this stage of defiant independence is important for all children. According to experts, children's brains are developing at an extremely fast pace. This development begins the process of children becoming their own people, complete with independent thoughts, feelings, and opinions.

Experts also believe children are testing parents during this stage. Will parents let them run the show, or will they set limits and stand by them? Setting limits helps children learn which behavior is appropriate or inappropriate. They learn rules that help them decipher the social world happening around them.

- 1. Stop arguing** – Arguing with a toddler is like trying to nail Jell-O® to the wall. It can't be done, and neither can "winning" an argument with a toddler.
- 2. Let go of control** – Give two, and only two choices. Asking, "Do you want to wear the white shirt or the blue shirt?" puts toddlers in the driver's seat and gives the illusion of control. When toddlers feel in control, they are less likely to say "No!"
- 3. Stay calm** – As hard as it may be, not reacting can be a powerful tool when attempting to diffuse a temper tantrum. For example, if a toddler demands cereal for breakfast and promptly throws the cereal on the floor, calmly acknowledge that the toddler did not want the cereal.
- 4. Ask for help** – Feeling important can go a long way in preventing a temper tantrum. If the goal is to leave the house, asking a toddler to help find his/her shoes or toy to bring along can provide a sense of independence and pride.

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(cont.)

**5. Ignoring with purpose** – As simple as it sounds, ignoring the negative behavior and praising the positive behavior communicates what is expected. Look for opportunities to tell your toddler you like what they are doing or how they are behaving.



**6. Get silly** – Dancing, breaking into song, or putting on a silly act can distract a toddler long enough to accomplish what it is that needs accomplishing. A laughing toddler is much more likely to get in the car to go to the store than a toddler in the middle of an argument.



**7. Know when to say "yes"** – Enforcing big rules and refusing to accept dangerous behavior should be consistent day in and day out, no matter how loudly a toddler protests. If your child's "no" is in response to something insignificant such as refusing to wear regular shoes and opting for rain boots on a sunny day, what harm is there in letting the "no" prevail?



Although the "Terrible Twos" make parents want to pull their hair out in frustration, it is important for them to remember that it is only a phase. Eventually, sweet and compliant toddlers will return, a little more independent, and a little more confident in their abilities to advocate for their likes and dislikes.



Resources:

*Why Your Toddler's "No!" Phase is so Important (And How to Survive It)*, accessed February 12, 2019 from "The No Stage", accessed February 12, 2019 from <https://www.motherforlife.com/baby/13-36-months/psychology/1392-the-no-stage.html>

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