



No, No, No – What Else is a Parent to Say?

by Michele R. Acosta

The word **no** is probably the most overused word in the English language. I speak from experience since I myself use it frequently.

I might begin a normal day by saying, "No, Joshua, you may not have a hotdog for breakfast," or "No, Alex, please don't throw your cereal on the floor." After breakfast, I might say, "No, Joshua, don't hit your brother," or "No, Alex, don't kick your brother."

While I'm making lunch, I usually need to tell Alex, "No, you cannot climb onto the kitchen table." By early afternoon, which is the time of day I set aside for my work, I usually find myself telling Joshua, "No, you cannot wake Alex from his nap" or "No! Don't touch Mommy's computer!"

By late afternoon, I find myself saying either one or a combination of the following: "No, you cannot climb on the dresser"; "No, you cannot sit on the dresser"; "No, you cannot jump off of the dresser." By early evening my repertoire usually includes, "No, boys, you cannot crash your cars into the walls" and "No, Alex, you cannot eat the cookie you've dropped on the floor. No! You can't take the dirty cookie out of the garbage!" On any given day, by the time my sons are securely tucked into their beds and are soundly sleeping - that can be anywhere from 8:00 until 11:00 - I have probably used the word **no** at least one-hundred times.

No has little value in our household, which I look upon as a microcosm of the world at large. People habitually ignore signs saying: no parking, no smoking, or no loitering. Last night, I watched a man park his car in a parking place reserved for the handicapped. Although the car had a handicapped parking permit displayed properly, none of the four people who emerged from the car had any visible handicap.

People generally look upon an answer of **no** as a challenge. Romantic movies are filled with plots in which the guy doesn't give up until he gets the girl and they live happily ever after. If so many adults fail to respond to the word **no**, then how can I expect anything different from two small children? The answer is that I cannot expect anything different, yet breaking the "no habit" is a difficult prospect.

With such blatant overuse, the word **no** has obviously lost its meaning; at least it has lost its meaning for my sons. The more often I say **no**, the less often my sons respond to it; it is as if a viscous circle has taken over the discipline in our household. If I had not already recognized the overuse of this two-letter-word which has invaded my home, I would have been startled when Alex, my almost-two-year-old son, began saying, "No-no-no. No-no-no." He has even been known to chant "no-no-no, no-no-no," while walking through the house with a cup of juice. I console myself with the thought that he at least understands that juice does not belong outside of the kitchen.

I find this to be a very difficult situation. With boys like mine, I cannot sit idly by waiting for a witty response to hit me in the face. It is more likely that they will hit each other in the face - or somewhere else. My greatest concern is that one day they will be in a dangerous situation (thinking, of course, that they are having great fun) and that my warnings will go unheeded because **no** has no meaning for them. Not that jumping off of dressers and climbing on tables are not potentially dangerous situations;

this is the reason why I do not waste time on brilliantly creative responses which would satisfy the gurus of child psychology before mobilizing into action. It simply seems that climbing and jumping are commonplace occurrences in my house. In retrospect, it is easy to tell myself that I should have been more creative in formulating responses to my sons' exuberance and zest for life; however, in the midst of two boys rolling on the floor with legs and arms flailing, the word closest at hand is usually: No!

I have attempted to extricate myself from this circle in which no resembles yes more than it resembles itself. I have tried laughing; they laughed with me as they jumped from the fourth step of the staircase. I have tried getting on the floor and rolling around with them; they pinned me down and Alex almost choked me as he tried to climb on my back for a piggy-back-ride. At that moment, I again reverted to humor saying to my son, "Alex, you are an instigator. Do you know what that means?" He threw his arms up in the air and yelled, "Fun!"

I have tried to curb my use of the word no by curbing my sons' activities. My attempts at discipline have included giving time-outs, sending them to their rooms, and putting them in corners. These methods seemed to have some immediate value, but only until the next time. I even tried to instill more meaning in the word no by saying very seriously, "No means no!" I have to admit that I have been reduced to this innocuous statement more often than once.

There are times when I simply let chaos reign. I listen closely for the danger signals and intervene only if and when I hear them. I can also count on Joshua, who recently turned four, to tattletale. It's wonderful because he even tattletales on himself.

Recently, I ignored all of the thuds and booms that I heard coming from the toy room. I even ignored the cries and screams since none lasted for more than a few seconds. Eventually, Joshua came downstairs to tell me that Alex was in the bathroom taking everything out of the cabinet. I walked up the stairs, expecting to find towels strewn about. Instead, I found Alex standing on the vanity removing all of the medicine from the medicine cabinet. Joshua, who had followed me up the stairs, left the bathroom and returned a few moments later with a large bottle of children's cough medicine and a small bottle of syrup of ipecac that he had found in Alex's bedroom.

Somehow, no did not pack enough power to deal with the situation, so I immediately purchased safety locks for the bathroom and laundry room doors. That eliminated several instances of no per day.

Since I cannot remove all of the furniture from my house, and since I cannot alter my sons' perception of the word no (any more than I can stop my brother from parking illegally downtown), I must continue my search for other successful methods of eliminating no from my vocabulary. The tactic that usually works best with any child is patience; although, it is difficult to be patient when your children are perpetually black and blue, so I must use patience cautiously when jumping and climbing are involved. There are, however, plenty of other occasions in which the word no surfaces in my house. On these occasions, it is my goal to find another response to the situations which arise. So the next time I catch Alex eating Vaseline, before groaning or screeching - No! - I'll have to take a deep breath and say, "Alex, are you hungry?"

If I can successfully reduce these instances of the word no in my vocabulary, I hope that, with age, my sons will eventually learn that no does have a meaning. Until that time arrives, I am left with several years of holding my breath every time I hear Joshua say, "Alex, let's jump!" In the meantime, I have stocked up on Dalmatian Band-Aids and Bactine.

About the author:

The author is a writer, a former English teacher, and the mother of three boys. She spends her time writing and teaching others to write. Visit articles.TheWritingTutor.biz for more articles or TheWritingTutor.biz for other writing and educational resources for young authors, teachers, and parents.