

Parents bemoan, "The minute I say 'no' to my child, she pitches a fit. But if I say 'yes,' there's no problem. How can I say 'no' and have my child accept my decision?" It surprises them when I tell them it's not a matter of yes versus no. The issue is whether the child feels the parent is truly aligned with their decision. When parents are clear about the purpose of their yes or no and can communicate this, the child responds appropriately.

How often do we say "yes" to our children without really thinking through what we are saying? Our "yes" isn't a meaningful yes that's said with all the factors of the present situation in mind, but is more of an off-the-cuff thoughtless reaction that's a reflection of our mood rather than what the situation calls for. Because our "yes" isn't an authentic yes, children quickly realize it's arbitrary. Similarly, because we say "no" a lot of the time when there's really no reason to say no, this too feels random to the child. Consequently, yes and no have no real meaning, which means they can be argued with and changed for the sake of peace if the child pushes hard enough.

When parents don't buy into their family policies, they fail to inspire their children to do so. Little wonder children keep pushing their parent's buttons to test whether they mean what they say. For instance, a child asks for an iPod Touch because all their friends have one. The parent feels the child doesn't need one, believing the novelty will wear off. However, wanting to please the child, and not clear about their own convictions, the parent yields to the demands.

The parent would do better to say, "I really hear that you want an iPod. Let's discuss why this is important to you. If we can both agree this will enhance your life in a positive

manner, we'll find a way for you to obtain one. This may mean you pay for part of it and I pay for part of it. We also need to agree on guidelines for how you'll use it."

When such a dialogue occurs, the child begins to understand that things aren't given or denied randomly, but that there's always a serious thought process behind the decision to give or deny. Through the consistent use of such meaningful conversations, children come to feel their parents are allied with them.


When there's a mutually agreed-upon expectation around something of this nature, the parent isn't thrust into the role of policing it. The parent ensures that the child is sufficiently mature to maintain their side of the agreement. If the child isn't mature enough and the parent still decides to enter into this agreement, they need to be fully aware of the muck that will be stirred up when their expectations aren't followed. Thus it's imperative parents do their own emotional homework before saying "yes" or "no" to their children.

When a parent's own life manifests integrity, children are far better able to accept "no" when it's required. The child understands the parent isn't saying no merely to flex their muscles. Because any arbitrariness in terms of our "yes" or "no" has been eliminated from the equation, children learn to trust there's always a solid reason for the parent's decisions, which invites them to buy into these decisions.

To give a child things or deprive them because to do so matches our subconscious agenda—our unresolved emotional baggage—rather than aligning with their developmental needs, is to court conflict. But if we are clear about the purpose of our decisions, aware of both our own and our child's agenda, though the child may not like what

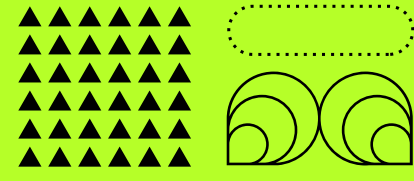


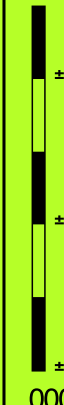
**Excerpt from
Out of Control
by Dr. Tsabary**





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