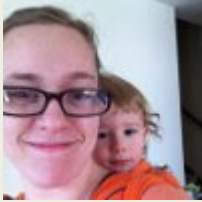


The Power Of Saying Yes



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“Balancing on My Toes” is an original column appearing every other Friday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by Angel M. Ethell. Angel lives in the Chicagoland area with her family: sons Teen (13) and Lil G (2) along with their little sister Cassie Pie (dog), and her partner Daddy G. She loves learning new things along with learning that she might not always be right... 100% of the time. Archived columns can be found here. BMT-only RSS feed available here.

Yes is a powerful word for parents. The power of yes can open up whole new worlds for a child and parent. When a parent says yes, trust is built and a child learns value in his or her own thoughts and feelings. Yes can build confidence, yes can build respect, and yes can build patience; these all for both parent and child. As parents we are always saying no and seldom do we say yes, but I had to ask myself one day why I was always saying no. I would say no to playing outside at inappropriate times, inappropriate snacks, toys, and other ideas my little ones (and not so little one) would ask for. I said no for the same reason so many parents say no. Its what we know. But then about a year ago I happened upon a concept and my family life hasn't been the same since.

I Stopped Saying No

If someone had just said stop saying no and gave me no context I would have been perplexed, but after really thinking about what it meant to stop saying no I really understood. Saying no all the time was damaging the parent-child relationship. I learned that cutting a child off without validating their request was part of the problem. Children cannot communicate fully with us, even the ones that have a fuller vocabulary, or use reason all the time so when they ask “Can I have these cookies Mom?” or something like that they are not thinking that it may be close to a meal time; they are thinking cookies are good, so I want some cookies. Sometimes we forget that as adults, and just say no without an explanation. The child then may not understand and feel that it was an arbitrary decision when in fact there is a completely sound reason that may not have been communicated with the word no. Even not now isn't really enough for younger children.

So I Started Saying Yes

Children will always have unreasonable demands and inappropriate requests and they way

we handle them will shape their future and how they process the world around them. When I started saying yes I did not give in to every demand and whim as you may be thinking. Nope, what I did was take the suggestion of the method and created a yes environment. This took a lot of work, but as my small toddler became more independent the more I saw the value in our yes environment. We rearranged the furniture so that it was non-obstructive which meant no living room table as we were accustomed to for drinks, magazines and such, and other changes. We toddler proofed with all that soft striping on edges of things and padded corners of all the tables in his area. We made sure that if there was climbing to be done it was set up safely to lessen the falling and so many other things like that. We put away our decorative glassware and other knick knacks we had accumulated while not having a toddler and pretty much rearranged our whole house. This yes environment opened up his play area and gave him plenty to explore safely while we moved about our day.

And Its Hard to Say Yes All the Time

Once I began saying yes and stopped saying no I had to be more creative than ever. Now when prompted with unreasonable requests I had to really think about and learn to communicate with my small child which is much harder than just saying no. There are better responses than no. Yes, you may have that popsicle, but pretty soon we are going to have dinner so you may have it, just not now. And then because he's two we have to have a conversation about how its okay to want something really bad but sometimes we have to wait. This is a longer process which takes the time to validate the child's feelings. After all, popsicles are delicious, who wouldn't want a popsicle?, but now is just not the right time for treats. Then we talk about what times are good for treats. Talking to a toddler like this gives them the tools necessary to really understand all about the world around them. Now, just like saying no, telling a child that yes they can do something but have to wait may cause a sudden outburst of emotion. We call them tantrums, but in reality the child is just trying to process his emotions and may be overwhelmed by what he or she is feeling. As the parent we can talk them through what they are feeling and give them the words if needed without giving in to the original request. We can tell them that it is okay to feel angry and that you are there for them to help them process and recover. Give lots of hugs during this time even if your first reaction is to yell and tell them to stop acting that way. Small children just do not have the emotional control that adults do so even though it may not seem like it, they are having a hard time, not trying to give their parent one.

The Power Of Yes

I was raised in a family that yelled all the time and used the phrase "because I said so" more often than explaining the real reason I was not allowed to do the things I wanted to do. I found this a very unsatisfactory answer and would drive my Mom nuts asking the same question over and over again. Now, if she had used this technique on me I believe

she would have saved herself (and me) many yelling sessions. I was usually good once I understood a situation, but phrases like no and “because I said so” are barriers in communication and left me with more questions than I started with because I wanted to know why I was being told no. With my own children I had already decided to not use “because I said so” but now I have some of the tools to reap the benefits of fully explaining the world to my children. Once I understood the root idea of saying yes my home life changed. I even use it on my teen now, in a moderated way, and it is helping bridge communication gaps with us as well as my toddler. Now when he asks why he has to clean his closet out I explain that it needs to be easily accessible because his closet has the access hatch for the roof instead of “because I said so” which is much more motivating. Saying yes has had a profound impact on my life and family happiness. It takes a lot of work but it certainly has brought us closer together as a family, and that will always be worth it to me.

For more information on creating a yes environment or saying yes, please visit the web for a wealth of information. Just search “creating a yes environment”. Dr. Sears has some pretty interesting things to say here but there is a lot more out there.

Read more from “Balancing on My Toes”: