

When saying 'no' to your kids falls on deaf ears

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The problem

"My kid just won't take 'no' for an answer. It drives me crazy. Why can't he ever accept it for what it means? 'No.' Why is it that whenever I say 'no,' it triggers an endless flood of objections?"

"But why not?" "You have to." "That's not fair."

Why can't you ever get begrudging acceptance?

Contrary to most opinions, the refusal to accept no is not an indication of budding character flaws. Children who object to not getting their way are not bad, they are just alive and possessed of speech. The normal response to not getting one's way is to be upset and to try to undo the current unpleasant state of affairs.

Children today are not afraid of their parents. They do not worry about dire consequences for being a pest – there generally are none. In the old days, they would have gotten smacked. Today's way is far superior but it requires a different strategy.

What not to do

Do not, whatever you do, lecture.

"Why can't you accept that sometimes you're not always going to get your way? Some day you are going to have to learn that the world does not revolve around you."

Such impassioned speeches don't work. All they ever do is feed their arguing.

"But you never do anything for me."

So long as they're getting a response from you, they will try to change your mind.

What to do

Give them your reason for refusing them. Make it brief and then listen to what they have to say. Briefly. Give them that respect. You can even change your mind. But otherwise – end the discussion. Of course that does not mean that they are going to end their discussion.

"But your reason is stupid. Why can't you drive me to the store. There's plenty of time."

You do need to stop the debate. Don't even say: "I don't want to hear any more about it." (Lots of luck with that one.) The truth is that any response to their objections will feed their non-acceptance.

Once you make your final decision, stick with your "no." If you regularly follow this practice, they learn that they can fuss as much as they want, but it's not going to get them anything. They still won't accept the no, but they'll stop arguing faster because they have learned that further argument is fruitless.

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