

Teaching the concept of “no”

It's important that your child learn the concept of “no” for many reasons:

- To learn what behavior is acceptable and what is not acceptable
- To demonstrate that he/she is a different individual than you, ie, that they have different thoughts
- To learn how to stop a behavior when told to do so
- To learn how to problem solve and be creative (eg, “If I can't touch the hot stove, what can I do for fun?”)

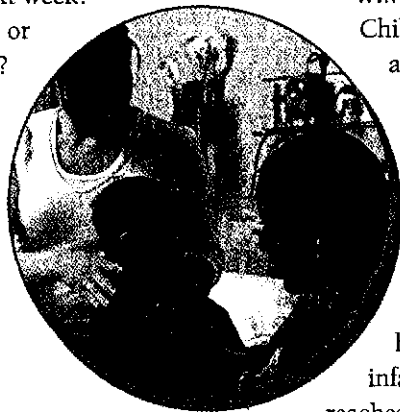
You can teach your 9-month-old the concept of “no” by using the five “Ds”:

Determine the rules

This is actually one of the more difficult tasks for first-time parents, since everything your child does will be new, cute, and exciting. The first time your child touches the remote control, for instance, you will probably laugh and enjoy the new activity. However, you need to be the adult in your child's life, and be able to look into the future. Will you continue to enjoy this childish behavior if the child does it repeatedly over the next week?

Will it still be funny and cute, or will it become quite annoying?

If the answer is that it will be annoying, you may decide that this activity should be discouraged by using the word “no.” (Or you may decide to move the object, changing the infant's physical environment.)



Demeanor changes

Parents should change their demeanor if they are going to use the word “no.” Remember: infants and young children pay close attention to your face and tone of voice, responding more to your demeanor than words spoken. Turn your face away from your infant and finish laughing before attempting to use the word “no.” Your face should be very serious and your voice lowered. Moms, especially, need to lower their voices so that the infant will recognize that this conversation is different and meaningful.

Displace the infant

Once you have said “no” to a behavior, move your child away from the offending object.

Distract

Now that your child is in a safe place, distract your infant with something else—a toy or a book. Your infant may choose to crawl back to the desired, forbidden item. Therefore, the next “D” becomes very important.

Diligence

(because “consistency” didn't start with a “D”!)

Children learn from consistency. Consistency allows children to predict consequences of their actions, adjust their behavior, and ultimately develop self-control. Being consistent is very difficult for parents, but you need to remember that your child will learn that you mean what you say when you are consistent in your actions.

Most parents who do use the word “no” have experienced another situation. The infant is heading toward a forbidden object, reaches out to touch it, but first looks back at the parent to see what might happen. The infant is clearly incorporating the concept of “no” and while in the process of learning, wants to make certain that the parents will indeed be consistent.

Helping children learn the concept of “no” will begin to help them understand the rules of their world and will help them begin to respect your leadership in your home, just as they will need to respect the leadership of teachers and employers later in life.

If this approach is not working either because your young child does not respond, or you find the recommendations hard to follow, please let your pediatrician know.

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