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Many parents are confused, even startled sometimes, to hear their child first say “No” to them. And then, as that child gets older and older, the confusion and startlement tends to fade while the frustration and annoyance builds. So, what do we do when a child says “No”?

There are so many answers and not one single answer is going to be the perfect fit for every child. So many factors play in to how we should respond to this undesired behavior; the age of the child, the temperament of the child, and our own attachment to our child.

Let’s first consider age-appropriateness. When a 2 year old says “No”, he/she is generally exerting independence and autonomy. Desire to be independent generally out-ruled the desire to be obedient for the 2 year old. When a 3 year old says “No”, it can be related to the independence factor as well as the beginning stages of testing limits. When that 4 year old says “No”, typically testing has already been executed and proven OK to say.

So, assuming that parent and child have a solid, healthy attachment formed and fostered through the first years of life, and the child’s temperament is average for a child that age, the following steps should help in eliminating the “NO” word.

-You have asked your child to buckle up and they say “NO”.

- Stay calm and firm in your tone of speech.
- Quickly analyze the situation to determine if “No” is acceptable in the circumstances. (This is not). If not:
 - Give a choice that will work for you. “You can buckle up by yourself or I can buckle up for you. Which one will it be?”
 - Give a few seconds for a response. If no response...
 - Allow 5 counts for them to decide. “You have until the count of 5 to choose and then I will get to choose for you and you may not like what I choose. One, two,”
 - If they choose, accept whichever choice as both works for you. Remind them that making good choices first helps everyone to stay happy.

Hopefully this gives a few guidelines and suggestions that will be helpful. The main thing to remember is that this phase starts young, and if handled properly and consistently through those testing periods, it can be almost extinct in the later preschool years.