

Raising Likeable, Responsible, Respectful Children in an Age of Overindulgence

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How to Say “No” to Your Kids by Jean Illsley Clarke

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Why does the word “No” stick in the throats of some parents? Why have many kids learned that parents who say “No” will buy what the kids want if they ask nine times?

There may be as many reasons parents don’t say “No” as there are parents and probably even more reasons why they don’t stick to it, but some of the common explanations are:

- We want our children to be happy.
- We want our children to have the things other children have.
- We want our children to be busy so they don’t get into drugs or gangs.
- We want our children to like us.

All of these reasons are about caring and come from a good heart. But, the ability to say no and mean it is important if we are to avoid overindulging.

Children need limits as well as love, so children need to know that the parents are in charge of the family, what the family’s values are, and where the boundaries are. This means that parents have to be able to say no to some things and stick to it as easily as they say yes and carry through on other things.

By the time a child reaches her third birthday she should be able to respond appropriately and consistently to the safety commands—stop, come, go, sit, and wait. But even if that child does know how to respond to those basic directives, she, being a smart kid, will test us.

Think about how your child lobbies for a new purchase. Does he negotiate by saying *I know this is expensive, but these are the reasons I want it, and if I save half of the cost, will you match it?*

I hope so (at least part of the time). But sometimes children whine, manipulate, beg, or guilt. *Please, please, please may I have it? I really want it!* Or, *You gave one to my brother so don’t you love me?* Or, *All the other kids have it, and, if you get this, I won’t ask for anything else.*

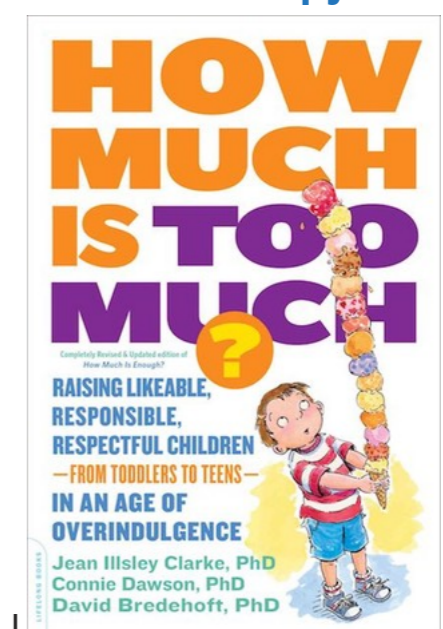
Remember, children are bombarded with “buy” messages, both directly and subtly, every day. In addition to the constant barrage of brand names and symbols on their and other children’s clothing, and on signs everywhere, the American Academy of Pediatrics reports that the average American child sees more than 40,000 commercials a year. 40,000 *buy* messages absolutely assure that parents will have to say no; probably a lot more often than they would like to.

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How Much is Too Much?

How Much is Too Much? is the only book on overindulgence with scientific support that tells parents and professionals what to do instead.

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36 Ways to Say No

Anybody can get tired of saying “No” over and over so what to say instead? A recent feature story in *Newsweek* listed 17 items on my “Ways to Say No” list. Here is the whole list. You can add more. And be sure your face, voice, and body reinforce the messages otherwise children won’t believe you.

- No.
- Just no.
- No, and that’s final.
- No, absolutely not, no way.
- No! Do not ask me again.
- Did you hear me say no?
- I have thought about it and the answer is no.
- We don’t have money for that right now.
- You already have enough of those.
- That is too old for you.
- We need that money for something else.
- I don’t approve of it.
- Nice try.
- I already know you know how to nag.
- Go find something else to do. I’m starting to get really angry with you.
- Your whining makes me think you may already have too many toys.
- I’m considering taking back the last five things I have bought for you.
- I remember saying no.
- Perhaps you didn’t hear me say we are not going to do that?
- Who is the grown-up here?
- I’m not going to be changing my mind about this.
- You know the rule and it hasn’t changed.
- You may notice I’m not saying yes.
- This conversation is over. I’m walking away now.
- This is not fun. Think of something else to do.
- It’s your money, but I’m in charge.
- You are marching around the edge of my patience.
- I am the parent. Parents make these decisions.
- You can be content with what you have.
- It’s okay to want something.
- Want never killed anybody.

There is more help about avoiding overindulgence in *How Much is Too Much? Raising Likeable, Responsible, Respectful Children – From Toddlers To Teens – In An Age of Overindulgence* (2014, DaCapo Press Lifelong Books).

