Why Your Child Says “No” to Everything Transcript

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Why Kids Say No

When a child's automatic answer to everything becomes no, it's not attitude. It's a nervous system protecting itself. Parents often describe it this way.

Everything is a fight. This kid is so difficult. They refuse before I even finish the sentence. It's like they're wired to say no, but underneath of it all is the same fear because these kids are wired, to be anxious.

So they say, no to everything. And this is what parents really started thinking about. They start thinking, am I raising an oppositional defiant kid? So many people in the Facebook groups are constantly talking about their ODD kid.

I can tell you, you don't see a pattern in a brain that's oppositonal defient. What you see in their brain is anxiety. So here's the shift. that I want you to really start to think about.

Because when we put our labels on these kids, they fulfill them. So I you want to make that persistent no isn't about control, it's about self-protection.

When a child's brain senses pressure, unpredictability, or demand where it doesn't feel that it is capable, question. It's going to try to protect itself no matter which way we go, right?

Anxiety, Autonomy, and Cognitive Overload

So the brain is going And if the answer feels like I know, right, it doesn't even have to be real. But if it's perceiving as unsafe, what the nervous system is going to do, its going react.

The brain shifts into protection mode. And for many kids of all ages, It's a no. Right. I had a know kid who just said no, I'd be like, isn't it nice out?

No. They just start putting up these walls. They go into fight mode. It creates space because it reduces demand. And what does it do? That no restores a sense of control for them.

Kids will take control any way they can, healthy or unhealthy. We'll talk about that. So it's a nervous system shield it isn't a reaction it not disrespect it the brain slowing things down pushing stress away and trying to regain safety and predictability the more unsafe the nervous systems feels.

stronger that shield becomes. Why does a nervous system get stuck on repeat? So number one, demand sensitivity. We have certain kids that struggle when demands happen, right?

What parents see is immediate refusal, even for things the child usually likes. What's happening is their nervous systems interprets the demands as threats, the faster the demands, the more you demand the demand, The faster than now.

Okay. This is especially common with kids with anxiety, ADHD, PDA style, nervous systems, trauma, chronic stress histories. Kids with neurodivergence often resist things because of the lack of predictability.

It doesn't mean we're never going to get these skills. Because we are all about positivity here, but we have to think about why is it happening? What can we do about it?

Number two, a low sense of autonomy is often a driver to the no. And kids need to feel some control over their environment.

Stress Accumulation and Age-Based Behaviors

When everything feels directed, rushed, corrected, the nervous system is going to push back and no becomes the only way to be autonomous, to only feel in control.

Kids often get labeled as I know they're doing this on purpose. I knew they were manipulating, but this isn't manipulation. It's regulation seeking. The no is the control.

So we have to change that. Okay. Number three, cognitive overload. If a task feels too big, unclear, overwhelming what's going to happen. The brain can't plan, executive functioning is going shut down, and no becomes avoidance.

It's not refusal to cooperate. it's the brain saying, I don't know. I know where to start. What this is about. And I like this. That uncertainty. So that is why we have to create a constancy.

We have make sure that we are scaffolding. Number four, stress accumulation is a big reason why kids say no. That constant stressor, right? Stressors that happen throughout the day, different demands from the Wi-Fi to the annoying kids, that stress cup I talk about is full.

By late afternoon or evening, the stress cap is fall. We lose flexibility. Tolerance is low, no shows up. Not because of the request, but because everything before it.

The no looks like it's a straight out defiance, But we don't know what happened before. We know that our kids are more sensitive and it builds up So what does this actually look like?

So for preschoolers, you're seeing behaviors like dropping on the floor, yelling no. Elementary school kids, increase in arguing, refusing, negotiating endlessly.

Early in the 2026 and the time of this recording and I just see in all the little threads about school refusal.

What Helps Reduce the Automatic No

I also see kids, you know, this is after a holiday break and kids are not wanting to go back to school. Tweens, You're going to see eye rolling, sarcasm, door slamming, more than normal.

Teens you might actually see the opposite. Silence, shut down, whatever, or just disengagement. Different behaviors, same nervous system message. It's that I'm done.

This is too much for me. And we see a lot of these no behaviors. No doesn't always mean the word no is coming out, can be refusal resistant. Matthew told me, my daughter said no to like everything, brushing teeth, getting dressed, even dessert.

Instead of escalating, what we did is we shifted how the requests were made. fewer rapid commands, giving a little bit of a space between commands and more previewing, letting her know what was going to happen in advance from the get go.

And I had to tell you, I have a young adult and a teenager and I preview all the time for totally different reasons. I haven't know and have kid that likes to know.

And it lowers our anxiety. It's no big deal. Plus, I am a great executive function. I like to plan everything. Like to know what I'm doing too. So I've gotten them in the habit.

One choice is offered after the demand. Do not offer kids a lot of choices. Oh, well, do you want to do this? And do want that? No, one choice. You want to be clear.

Do you want this? Do want yes or no? Actually, I don't like when kids get off from yes, or now. I really like, when we give kids two choices. You wanna start now?

Or do you wanna to start in an hour? It's really one choice, but you're being clever. So, in this case, what started to happen, because this kid, they were really offering him too many choices, and he just was so overloaded, he was then in analysis paralysis.

But within a few weeks, the nose, really kind of almost stopped for them. And they saw a huge difference in just how he interacted with everybody. He wasn't an automatic no, he was a sometimes no.

So he didn't need that shield anymore once we stopped, which was great. Here's where parents go wrong. Number one, they take no personally. If we take these nos personally, we are going to dysregulate and we're going be stuck in co-dysregulation.

Number two, increasing pressure. You will do what I'm saying. Your stuck on forcing compliance. Pressure doesn't reduce resistance, it cements it. How do we actually counter the no?

Four steps. One, regulate before you request. Do you know why? Your tone, your posture, you're pacing matter than your actual words. A calm nervous system is going to invite cooperation.

And that distressed, stressed one is actually going to invite resistance. You're going get into it. you're gonna get in to the red with them. Two, reduce that demand load.

So say less, ask less. Slow the pace. Here's an example. Instead of get your shoes on right now, try shoes are next, I'll sit with you. so you are not saying I don't want you to do this.

What you're saying is, I am here with you.

Reframing Defiance as Dysregulation

And you know, you are not going to do this forever. It's going get to the point where their nervous system knows they're safe and you can move on. That's a huge difference for you, okay.

Three, offer mini control. People want control, give a choice. Do you want to start with the socks or the shoes? So they are starting, they have a choose, that makes a difference.

Do you want to do the homework before or after your snack? Choice restores that safety and you buffer the no. Number four, we're going to work backwards.

This is all about executive functioning support. So always start with the end in mind. Anchor to the End. When this is done, then we rest. We want make sure we are showing them what finished looks like.

It takes away the fear and it also shows them, right? Clarity reduces avoidance, especially for our neurodivergent kids or sensitive kids. And just think, my child isn't being oppositional because we got to get rid of that.

Their nervous system is asking for safety and support. Once you have that ability to understand that, you stop getting so caught up in the argument with them.

What I want you to do this week is notice when the no shows up because we want to the L in comms and look for root causes. And it will help us to understand, is it the time of day?

Is it a type of demand? is your tone? It is the speed of the task? And then pick one moment this way to slow down. Right? Maybe offer a choice, reduce your words, watch what happens.

Because when safety comes first, then we can start seeing a huge difference.

Summit Promotion and Closing Resources

So when no becomes that default, it's not a behavior problem, It's a stress signal. And what we have to do is meet the nervous system's needs. When we do, the no loses its power.

And that's a big difference because we get so caught up in this defiance. And it's really about dysregulation. So what do we do? How do find more calm first tools?

Well, that can reduce and build up cooperation, make the nervous system feel more regulated. Well I have something really cool this week, a little different.

It's the Regulated Child Summit. Its free. You can go to DrRosanna.com forward slash regulated child Summit is also going to be in the notes and it's an opportunity to learn from top experts in a really quick, easy way where you're going.

Not a bunch of videos. You're gonna get short tips delivered in your inbox a couple of times a week for a month. And it's going to give you these actionable, easy resources that anybody can implement from some of the top people supporting kids and families.

So again, you can go to DrRosanne.com, Regulated Child Summit, and sign up for this free, amazing resource for you and your family. Want more insights and solutions?

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