

D's of Discipline

The word “discipline” often has negative connotations – it causes parents to think of bad experiences they had as children or they associate the word with severe punishment. However, the word “discipline” comes from a Greek word that means “to teach or instruct.” All parents realize that one of the most important roles of parents is to teach their children, but many are surprised to realize that teaching will begin at such an early age.”

Several developmental changes are occurring now that make it the right time to start teaching your baby what is correct behavior. Your baby is beginning to develop her own identity. She is realizing that she can become independent by crawling or moving away from you. She learns by exploring her environment, so she is going to check out every part of your home. She is also starting to understand what you say – and can begin to understand the concept of “no” or “stop”. (You may already have noticed this if you have told her not to touch something and saw that she looked at you a little differently.)

Parents are often concerned about using the word “no”. They think if they use the word too often, it will be one of the first words children say back to them. They also worry that they will be stifling or inhibiting their child’s creativity or development. We understand these concerns, but want to reassure you that it is very important for your child to hear you say “no”.

+ Having this concept of “no” actually helps his development

During the second year of life your child will need to develop more independence as he realizes that he is a different person from you. The best way he can show you that he thinks differently and wants to act differently from you is for him to say “no”.

+Hearing the word “no” helps her learn what behavior is acceptable and what behaviors she needs to stop

You may choose another word(s) such as “stop” or “don’t touch”, but the concept of “no” is implied. There is no way to tell your toddler to stop touching something dangerous without have the concept of no.

+Hearing the word “no” actually enhances your child’s ability to problem solve and be creative.

If your child is told “Don’t touch the hot stove”, then your child will start thinking – “If I can’t touch the stove, what else can I do for fun?” This allows your child to begin to think creatively and problem solve.

+Hearing the word “no” will help keep your child safe.

Most parents find that they use the word “no” at this age mainly to protect their children from danger.

+Hearing the word “no” will help your child recognize your leadership as parent.

Your child needs to respect you as the teacher and leader in your home. Then, later on, he will be able to respect his teacher at school and his boss at work.

You might be wondering – “how do I teach my child such a difficult concept as this?” The following “Ds” will help you teach your 9 month old the concept of “no”:

Determine the rules

Although this is the first thing for you to do – it is also the most difficult. Everything your child does will be new, cute, and exciting, and you will be tempted to laugh and enjoy the new activity, even if it is something as simple as touching the remote control on the television. However, you will need to think ahead – “Will I think this is enjoyable if she does it repeatedly over the next few weeks?” “Will this activity still be funny and cute, or will it become annoying?” If you decide that the behavior might become annoying, you may decide that this activity will be discouraged by using the word “no”. (You might also decide to change your child’s environment and move the remote control.)

Demeanor should be changed

If you are going to use the word “no”, you must change your facial expression – your demeanor. Infants and young children pay more attention to your face and tone of voice than they do to the words you say. So, if you are laughing at a new activity your little one is doing, but you think you should be discouraging it, turn your face away from your infant. Finish laughing before attempting to say “no”. Then turn back to your child with a serious face and a lowered voice to say “No, don’t touch”. Mothers especially need to lower their voices so that your children will recognize that what you are saying is important.

Displace your infant

Once you have told your infant “no”, move your child away from the activity or object.

Distraction

As you move your child to a different place, distract him with something else that he can play with – a book or toy. You should expect that he will crawl back to the desired, forbidden object. So the next “D” is especially important.

Diligence (because ‘consistency’ did not start with a “D”)

Children learn when the rules are consistent. Consistency allows your child to predict consequences of actions, adjust her behavior, and ultimately develop self-control. But being consistent is very difficult for parents! Your child will learn that you mean what you say when you are consistent in your response. Most parents have experienced this situation. The infant is heading toward a forbidden object, reaches out to touch it, but first looks back to the parent to see what might happen. The infant is clearly incorporating the concept of “no”, but while still learning, wants to make sure that the parent’s response will be consistent. So be Diligent / consistent in your responses.

Used by permission: Jane E. Anderson, M.D. “Prescriptions for Parents”

