



When Your Child Says No to Everything

When it feels like every request, big or small, gets met with “no,” it’s exhausting, and it can start to feel personal. It usually isn’t about the specific thing you asked for; it’s about control, overwhelm, or a pattern that’s built up over time. Here’s how to work with it instead of against it.

“Not every “no” is defiance. Sometimes it’s just a full nervous system asking for a slower pace.”

WHAT TO DO

- 1 Reduce how many requests you’re stacking at once.** One clear ask beats five.
- 2 Build in a beat of processing time before expecting compliance.** Some kids need a few seconds to catch up.
- 3 Offer a real choice inside the task.** “Do you want to brush teeth first or put on pajamas first?” The task stays, the control shifts.
- 4 Notice and name the first sign of cooperation.** Even partial: “You started, that’s the hard part.”

WHEN THEY DO COOPERATE

- ☐ Acknowledge it specifically and right away, “You did it even though you didn’t want to. That took something.”
- ☐ Resist the urge to immediately add another request, let the win stand on its own for a minute.
- ☐ Track which requests get the most pushback. A pattern (transitions, hygiene tasks, anything unscheduled) usually points to the real issue.

TRY THIS

“I hear you don’t want to. It still needs to happen. Do you want my help or do you want to try it yourself first?”

REDUCING THE BATTLES OVER TIME

Give warnings before requests land, especially for transitions, a countdown gives their brain time to catch up.

Build predictable routines where you can, so fewer requests feel random or sudden.

Praise flexibility when you see it unprompted, not just compliance you asked for.

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