

Language & Learning

Positive Parenting

Finding Alternatives to “No!”

At the beginning, when you are not sure that your hard-of-hearing child is understanding your speech, or that you have enough signs to get your message across to your deaf child, one of the easiest ways to deal with behavior is to say or sign, “No!” or “Stop it!” Unfortunately, if we use these words too much, they stop being effective. By the time babies are toddlers, they love to use “No!” themselves! We have to begin early to set limits, because they are in our child’s best interest. What are some other ways to stop inappropriate behavior and encourage appropriate behavior?

- You have already read about stating things positively instead of negatively. You tell or show your baby what to do, instead of what not to do. For example, if your little one is throwing blocks, you can show her how to drop the block in the bucket.
- You can pick your battles. If you identify behaviors that are dangerous and focus on those, you will give less negative feedback. Chewing on electric cords can be fatal, so discipline is needed. A baby who is throwing a cup off the high chair may be trying to get your attention or has just discovered a fun new game. You can respond by giving attention, or by removing the cup. You will respond to these situations differently. Your goal is to find a balance - you want to protect your baby from injury, but not squelch her curiosity.
- You can replace one behavior with another. When your baby crawls toward the TV cord, you can replace it with a teething toy in another part of the room.
- You can praise even a small step toward your goal. If your baby chews on appropriate toys, you can smile, laugh, and say, “Does that feel good?”
- You can remove your attention. Consistent and meaningful attempts to reach the TV cord can result in time in the playpen or another room, while Mom or Dad sits and reads a book.
- You can distract your baby with something completely different, maybe something that does not encourage chewing.

And here are some additional hints based on Anne Krueger’s *Parenting: A Guide to Your Baby’s First Year* (1999) Ballentine Books: New York.

- You can remove the object that is causing a problem. If the TV cord is just too fascinating, figure out a way to get it out of sight and out of mind.
- You can keep your baby away from the problem situation or area. Gate off TV area if your baby keeps treating the cord as a toy. She does not know it is an adult toy.

At first, describing feels like a lot of language to learn, for parents and for babies. Start by commenting on behaviors such as standing or drawing. As you read in the section about choices, keep a list of words you want to sign or emphasize when you speak. Doing so can help you to quickly learn to communicate. Now add to your list words you can use for praise, or to expand the name of the behavior, such as “I like it. Pretty colors.” Learn to talk about things that might actually happen in your family, or that you love to see your baby do, such as “Walking to daddy! Wow!” If you are signing, let yourself learn the language you want gradually as your baby does more and more appropriate things.

Remember to match your facial expression to what you are saying or signing. If you are excited by what your child does, show an excited expression. To be sure that you are not the only one “in on” the communication, call attention to the act or items being praised, emphasize the important language, and add gestures to help make the message clear.

Situation:	
Infant hands mommy the cup to request some more.	Nice asking. You want more! (Hold up the cup).
Toddler entertains herself with the kitchen Tupperware while dad cooks.	You are having fun! Playing by yourself. Daddy likes that. (Point to the objects)
Baby takes a bite of food after much coaxing.	Good eating! MMMM. Yummy carrots. (Lick your lips)
Toddler hands daddy a small screw he finds on the carpet.	Thank you! Not a toy. Good job. (Put the screw up high.)