

## **Teaching Children “How to Say No” to an Adult**

You may be reading this heading and thinking, “What is this doing in my Catholic Newspaper? The Ten Commandments clearly state, ‘Honor your father and mother.’ Why would we even suggest teaching a child how to say no to an adult?”

The sad truth of the world we live in is that it is not free from sin and evil. At the same time that we are teaching our children to be respectful of adults -- to follow God’s own commandments-- we must be watchful for those who would do them harm. Much as a good shepherd guides his sheep, we steer our children clear of harm by creating a safe environment for them. We teach them to follow our lead, learning safety rules, and recognizing signs of danger. We do not want our children to fall prey to a wolf in sheep’s clothing. At times we need them to resist so they are not led astray. How do we teach both – to follow and to resist being led astray?

As a society we are not always very good at respectfully disagreeing. Some of us avoid conflict; some sacrifice their own well-being to follow the authority of others; and still others see a difference of opinion as a green light to show disrespect. When we teach our children “how to say no” we are teaching them to disagree in a way that is respectful of others. Help children practice the following examples to resist danger:

**Use your manners:** A respectful no can be as simple as, “**No, thank you.**”

**Give a Reason:** We can respectfully disagree by calmly communicating a clear reason for our dissent. “**That’s against the rules.**” “**I want to follow the rules.**”

**Play the Parent Card:** Children honor their father and mother when they avoid what’s “not right” with excuses like: “**My parents won’t let me.**” “**I will get into trouble with my parents.**”

**Get a 2nd Opinion:** “When in doubt, check it out” is a good rule to practice and a motto few adults would disagree with. “**I want to ask my teacher first.**”

**Suggest an alternative:** Resistance does not always mean noncompliance. We can encourage children to offer a safe means to comply. “**Let’s just talk right here.**” “**Let’s just shake hands.**”

**Share your feelings:** One of the most respectful things we can do for one another is to share our feelings. “**This is scaring me.**” “**That makes me feel bad.**”

For more ways to “Say No” see “How to Say No to and Adult” below or contact the Child Protection Office at (308)382-6565 or [cpo@gidiocese.org](mailto:cpo@gidiocese.org) .

