

Toddler vs. Parent: A Survival Guide for the 'No' Phase



Why Do Toddlers Say "No"?

Around toddlerhood, "no" starts showing up — a lot. But this isn't just about being difficult. I'm **Dr. Sisniegas**, Ollie's child psychologist, and the first thing I'll tell you is: **they're NOT trying to be difficult.** They're learning they have their own thoughts, choices, and feelings — separate from yours!



It's Developmental

Saying "no" is how they explore their newfound independence and figure out how the world works.



Testing Boundaries

They're testing limits to understand what is real, consistent, and safe in their world.



It's Normal

It's developmentally normal. It's frustrating. But it is *survivable.*

Steps 1–3: Acknowledge, Guide & Give Choices



Step 1: Acknowledge Their Feelings

Pause before solving. When emotions are big, your little one needs to feel heard first. Try: *"I know, you REALLY wanted to keep playing — stopping is hard!"* Validation calms the brain so they can actually hear what comes next.



Step 2: Guide with Warmth & Firm Limits

Honor their "no" when you can: *"No jacket? That's fine — let's bring it just in case."* For non-negotiables like safety, hold the line calmly: *"Parking lots aren't safe. I'll hold your hand or carry you — your choice."*



Step 3: Give Choices Within the Boundary

Choices give them a sense of power — within *your* limits. When in doubt, make it fun! *"Can your teddy bear help zip your coat?"* or *"Race you to the bathroom — I bet I'll win!"*

Steps 4–5: Build Momentum & Stay Consistent



Step 4: Switch to a "YES" Mindset

If you're stuck in a "no" loop, help them say YES to *something* first: *"Did you see that big truck?"* or *"Wanna listen to your favorite song while we clean up?"* A few small yeses build momentum for what comes next.



Step 5: Stay Consistent

If they learn that protesting changes the rule, they'll keep pushing. That doesn't mean being harsh – just steady and firm: *"I hear you don't want to go to bed. We'll read one story, then lights out."* Predictability teaches them the boundary is real.



Remember: This Is Temporary

This phase can get really frustrating, but it will be over before you know it. They're learning important skills – and *you* are helping them get there, one "No" at a time.

You're Not Alone



Your Ollie Team

Reach out to your Ollie team for support navigating this stage – they're here for you.



Parent Coaches

Your parent coaches can give you ALL the helpful tools to get you through this phase.



Dr. Sisniegas

Ollie's child psychologist is here to help you understand your toddler's big feelings and big "no's."

References

- References: American Psychological Association (APA), American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Zero to Three, HealthySteps.