

When to Say “Yes,” How to Say “No”

Boundaries With Teens

Jim Deason

When Wilson asked me to write this article on raising teens the subtitle he gave me was “When to Say ‘Yes,’ How to Say ‘No.’” With tongue planted firmly in cheek, my response was “NEVER!!” and “EMPHATICALLY!!!”

Why such a response? Because parenting teens in this society is not for cowards. These are difficult times in which to raise good kids and for a lot of reasons. It is not unusual to hear older parents, once having gotten over the empty nest syndrome and having done a pretty good job in raising their own brood to remark, “I wouldn’t want to do it over again in this generation” or, “I really fear for my grandchildren and I don’t know what is going to happen to my great-grandchildren.” These are not statements of despair but rather of real concern regarding how to bring up godly kids in an ungodly world.

To the parents who are reading this I want to say – don’t lose heart and don’t give up. Let me remind you that this is not the first generation to face difficult times. Noah raised a godly family in a very wicked world (Gen. 6:5-12). If he did it, you can too.

Boundaries are important. If you wait until your children are in their teen years to set them, however, you have waited too long. Establishing boundaries for teens who have never experienced them may not be impossible but that task is often incredibly hard and unpleasant. So, start young!

Boundaries are rules. They are parameters of behavior that ideally are set forth by God. We should want nothing more nor less from our children than what God wants. This is why Moses commissioned the fathers of Israel to be diligent in instructing their children in God’s ways (Deut. 6:6-9). Paul encouraged fathers to bring up their children in the “instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). Fathers, hear the word of the Lord! It is *your* responsibility to teach your children; a responsibility you cannot abdicate to anyone else.

Rules require authority. By definition, children are immature. God has given parents the responsibility and authority to guide their offspring through the stormy developing years to maturity (Eph. 6:4). More than being a pal, God wants parents to be parents and to exercise their authority to establish consistent parameters of behavior and enforce them. The parameters establish the guidelines for proper behavior but it is the consistent enforcement of those parameters that becomes the foundation for respect.

Also, authority is sometimes a tough pill for teens to swallow. If authority is exercised without love you have a formula for rebellion. Your child needs to have confidence, beyond their ability to doubt, that you have their best interest at heart.

Boundaries must be exemplified. God commands parents to be lights in the world (Matt. 5:16; cf. Phil. 2:15); to be living examples of the virtues of good speech, faithful conduct, unconditional love, unswerving loyalty, and unquestioned purity (1 Tim. 4:12). No one knows better than your teenager whether or not your claim to godliness is genuine. When it is obvious that you are doing your best to live at the foot

of the cross then, and only then, do you have the moral authority to establish boundaries for your with the expectation that will respect you and obey the instruction you have given.

When do you say “Yes?”? Earlier I teasingly said “never,” but you know that is not true, nor should it be. When your child enters the teen years they are entering the stage of life where teaching them how to make independent decisions is critical. You steer them; always hoping that they will make the best decisions but knowing that sometimes they won’t. When they make good choices you say “yes!,” smile, and have that warm feeling in your heart that you did something right. In spite of your guidance however, at some point your child is going to make a bad decision and, where it doesn’t do physical or spiritual harm and with reservation, you may still need to say “yes.” It is important for a teen to learn that choices bring consequences, some of which are unpleasant.

How do you say “No?” It’s simple really. If something involves irreparable physical harm, if it is a sin, if it damages your teen’s reputation, if it hurts others or, if you are convinced that something is truly not in the best interest of your kid – *whew!* – you simply open your lips, place your tongue in the top of your mouth while breathing out and say, “NO!” As a wise woman advised me long ago, “You choose your battles and those you choose you win!”

You are in a battle for the soul of your child. This battle is not against flesh and blood but against spiritual forces of wickedness in high places (Eph. 6:12). Arm yourself and believe that “greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world” (1 Jn. 4:4). With God’s help, you can win. “The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice...” (Prov. 23:24).

Jim Deason
P O Box 2667
Cullman, AL 35056

jhdeason@bellsouth.net