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Feature

Parents need to learn to say no, set limits

Overindulged children may struggle in the real world

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By **Melissa Kossler Dutton**

The Rev. Cory Pariseau would love it if his children always liked him. But as a parent educator, he knows there will be times when they won't. "I will deal with them not liking me," said the single father of three, especially if it means he's helping them become hardworking, responsible adults.

Many parents struggle with how and when to say no to their children, said Pariseau, founder of the Columbus-based Parenting Pathways, which offers classes and support for parents working with area child protection agencies.

Sometimes mothers and fathers find it difficult to set limits on their children's behaviors, he said. Others feel guilty about working long hours or seeing their children only on the weekends and are reluctant to discipline their



A family meeting is a good place to start setting new expectations.

Am I too nice?

Once parents have mastered the art of saying no to their children, they might want to look at their other commitments and see where else they are being "too nice." A mom or dad who feels unappreciated, stressed out or tired might be taking on too many activities.

Parents who are always running late or can't sleep at night because they're

children, he added. But the bottom line is, it is

worried about everything they have to do should consider saying no more often. Cutting back on school, work and extended family commitments can lead to a more harmonious household.

possible to be too nice to your children. You have to say no when saying yes will cause them to develop a sense of entitlement or other character flaws you dislike, he said.

Saying yes all the time to children does them a disservice, added Craig Travis, a psychologist and director of the Mount Carmel Family Medicine Residency Program. "A parent's job is to prepare their child to successfully navigate the adult world on their own," he explained. "Kids who are given everything they want and are overindulged have a hard time adjusting to the real world situations where this doesn't occur simply because 'you are special.' In the real world, you have to earn it."

Parents should not feel guilty about telling their children no, Travis said. "Guilt implies you are doing something wrong, when actually you are not when you say no occasionally," he said. "Your child is not deprived, is not being neglected, and it is not a form of abuse if you say no to them. And it will not damage their self-esteem and their little psyches. They need limits."

Setting limits is part of the job of parenting, said Laura Meers, a psychologist with Meers Inc., in Columbus. Parents who don't set proper boundaries often create "unhealthy and, potentially, even dangerous results," she said. Children are actually happier when they have rules to follow, she said. "Although they may complain, they crave the guidance that a parent gives them by setting limits," she added. "The goal of good parenting is to set limits and, as the child grows and ages, to aid the child in setting limits and boundaries, until the child can begin to do this for him- or herself."

Parents who have had a hard time saying no should start adding rules slowly, said Pariseau. He recommends calling a family meeting to let the children know there will be new expectations for them. Tell them: "We're taking a different approach," he said. "We have to change some things if we're going to be able to reach the goals we want to reach."

Psychologists Craig Travis and Laura Meers offered the following tips for saying no:

1. Give yourself permission to say no.

2. You can say no without giving a reason.
3. If you must give a reason, tell the person, "For my health, I cannot take on anymore right now."
4. It's okay to offer to do a less-involved job or to help in the future.

Melissa Kossler Dutton has worked as a reporter for more than a decade. She's a frequent contributor to a variety of Ohio publications. She lives in Bexley with her husband and two sons.

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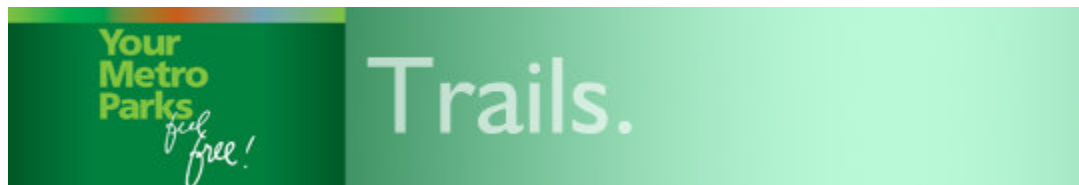
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