

## “No, Because I Said So”

*From “An Allowance is Not a Bribe” by Allan M. Gonsler, LMHP, CMSW*

When I was growing up, I hated it when my parents said, “No, because I said so.” I decided that when I had kids, I’d never, ever say those words to them. Well, I became a wiser man when I had children. I discovered that to be an effective parent I had to sometimes say, “No, because I said so.”

You shouldn’t be afraid to say “Because” to your children without giving any reasons. When you give your children too many reasons why they should go to bed at a certain time or eat their vegetables or go to Sunday School, you lose control. You may think your children will respond to a long list of rational reasons, but it usually doesn’t work this way. Children will begin to argue and challenge the reasons, and then the whole encounter will turn into a shouting match.

You shouldn’t be afraid to say, “Do it, because I told you to.” Children’s self esteem will not be damaged if you don’t give one million reasons why they need to follow your directions. Children might resent you and be angry with you for the moment, but that’s better than ending up with children who can’t control their behavior.

**The sticker approach to discipline.** This is the method in which parents use a bribe to get their children to behave by setting up a reward system for individual behaviors. Parents say, “If you do well, I’ll buy you a Barbie doll. If you’re really good, I’ll buy you a new outfit. And if you’re super, I’ll buy you a car when you’re 16.”

The sticker approach can be used successfully for children with learning disabilities who need concrete reinforcement of good behavior, or for children four and younger. Children ages five and older need to learn to respond without a monetary incentive when moms and dads say, “No, because I’m the parent.”

I don’t believe in democratic families. I believe in what I call the “benevolent dictator” approach to discipline. Don’t ask your kids open-ended questions such as, “What do you want for dinner?” or “What do you want to do this weekend?” These kinds of questions get you into trouble since they imply your children have an equal vote and say in the family decision-making process when they don’t.

You ask, “What do you want to eat for dinner?” Your children answer, “Steak and lobster.” You don’t have any steak or lobster and fix hamburgers instead. When situations like these keep occurring, children think you’re not listening to them and responding to their needs.

**Give realistic choices.** It’s better for you to give a couple of choices and let the children decide between them. It’s better for you to ask, “Do you want hamburgers or hot dogs?” As your children get older and show they can make competent decisions, you can give them more choices to select from.

You need to realize that discipline is not a quick or easy process. However, if you work at this task from the time your children are born until they're 18 years old, you'll raise competent, self-disciplined adults.

**Here's more you can do:**

- Understand the discipline style you were raised with and use the techniques if they feel right or modify them to better fit your situation.
- Spouses don't have to agree on discipline techniques, but you should work together to set consistent behavior standards for your children.
- Don't compare your rules and standards to those of your friends, parents or other family members.
- When your children are sent to their bedrooms for punishment, they shouldn't be allowed to talk on the telephone, watch television, listen to music or play electronic games.