

Accepting “No” for an Answer

One of the most difficult skills to teach is “Accepting ‘No’ for an Answer.” We all struggle, to one degree or another, when we cannot do the things we would like to do. Many times, students don’t think about why someone might be giving them a “No” answer, but simply react negatively to being told “No.”

The goal of the lesson is to teach students the appropriate behavioral expectations for the skill of “Accepting ‘No’ for an Answer.”

The objectives of the lesson for students include:

- learning the steps of the skill of “Accepting ‘No’ for an Answer.”
- practicing the skill.
- generalizing the use of the skill to different places and different people.

Introduce the Skill

Ask students to pair up and take out a sheet of notebook paper. Give students two minutes to generate a list of at least five situations where their parents/teachers have told them “No.”

Allow students to share some of their responses when the two minutes for brainstorming are up.

NOTE: Responses might include when students ask to go to a friend’s house right before dinner, ask to stay up late on a school night, ask to go to the restroom right after the bell for class to start rings, etc.

NOTE: Monitor student responses as they brainstorm their lists to make sure they are using appropriate responses. Don’t allow responses

like "When I beat up my little brother," "When I ask if I can have one of my mom's cigarettes," etc.

Describe the Appropriate Behavior

Provide students with the behavioral steps for the skill of "Accepting 'No' for an Answer."

NOTE: Steps can be posted on a bulletin board or shown on an overhead. Adapt the steps to fit your expectations and the needs of your students.

SAY: "Here are the steps of the skill of 'Accepting "No" for an Answer.'"

- 1. Look at the person.**
- 2. Say "Okay."**
- 3. Stay calm.**
- 4. If you disagree, ask later.**

SAY: "These are the steps we are going to use for the skill of 'Accepting "No" for an Answer' in this class and building."

Give a Reason

Ask the students to provide reasons for why they think it might be important to accept "No" for an answer using these steps. Here are some examples of reasons to use in case students have difficulty thinking of ones on their own:

- By accepting "No" answers, people may be more willing to negotiate with you and help you get part of what you want.
- People may be more willing to listen to your side of the story.
- Arguing with someone may make that person angry or hurt his or her feelings.

Practice

Choose one or more of the following activities to complete your lesson by allowing the students to practice the skill.

1. Have students tell their partners the steps of the skill.
2. **Journaling ideas**
 - Ask students to write about a time when they accepted "No" for an answer calmly and the result of using that behavior.
 - Ask students to write about a time they did not accept "No" for an answer and how they thought it made the other person feel.

- Ask students to write about a time they did not accept "No" for an answer, the result of behaving that way, and how they would behave differently now.

3. **Class discussion and role-play:** Use the following story as a discussion starter for the skill of "Accepting 'No' for an Answer."

Michael, a 14-year-old, asked his mom if he could go to the movies with a girl he met (and likes) at school. His mom doesn't know very much about the girl, so she told Michael, "No, you cannot go to the movies with this girl until I know more about her." When Michael's mom said "No," he became frustrated and angrily mumbled, "You never let me do anything I want to do. I can't stand this place." Michael's mom's feelings were hurt because she was just trying to look out for Michael's safety and well-being.

Ask the following questions after you read the story to your class.

- How did Michael do when accepting "No" for an answer?
- What could Michael have done differently?
- How would you have handled the situation? (What would you do to make things better with your mom and maybe get to go to the movie?)
- Is there a possible compromise Michael and his mother could work out?

NOTE: Use the answers to the questions to stress the idea of asking later, once the emotional intensity of the situation has decreased, and building on the rationale that other people may be willing to negotiate.

- After you debrief the story, ask the students to write a skit demonstrating the appropriate way to accept "No" for an answer. Give the students 10 minutes to create and practice their skits and then ask for volunteers to present it to the class.

SAY: "Thank you for completing the practice activity. We will continue to discuss the skill of 'Accepting "No" for an Answer' for the rest of the week."

NOTE: Each day of the week, review the steps of the skill, discuss why it is important to use the skill, and practice when possible.

Other Ideas for Practice

NOTE: As you develop other ideas for practicing the skill, write them here and share them with other staff members in your building.

For younger students (K-5), use literature to lead a discussion on how to accept "No" for an answer. Books by popular children's author Julia Cook, including *I Just Don't Like the Sound of No!*, are recommended.

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