

Saying “No” To Your Child

By Paula Levensailor

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As an elementary school principal I have been alarmed for the last few years at the wave of Kindergarten students who come to school without manners, without an understanding of behavior in public or respect for authority.



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David Walsh, author of No: Why Kids of All Ages Need to Hear It and Ways Parents Can Say It, contends that we have an epidemic in this country of “DDD – Discipline Deficit Disorder.” He explains how it affects all of us from those of us out in public trying to enjoy a restaurant or shopping, to the teachers in the classrooms who no longer want to give a student a low grade because they have to fight with the parents, to the business leaders who struggle with the young workforce lacking any sort of work ethic.

Walsh sees that parents, whether feeling guilty over working so much, living such fast-paced lives or because they simply can’t stand seeing their child unhappy have tended to abandon the word “no” from their vocabulary. They’ve become the “yes” culture and the “just do it” generation.

While we are all born to seek pleasure, we also have to learn to manage that drive on our own. To live a balanced life, we need to have self-discipline and be self-reliant

about making good choices. We also need to learn that there is going to be disappointment in life and how to cope with that. That can’t happen if parents “make” things happen for their children and shelter them from discipline.

I have been in education for 33 years. I noticed a shift starting in the late 80’s with the “self-esteem movement.” I remember the frustration of running a school as parents told us not to do anything that might hurt their child’s self-esteem.

Since then, society has continued to tailspin. We still do not tolerate students who talk back, argue, or insist on having their own way in school. We do encourage good attendance and punctuality. We do reward students for genuine effort and accomplishments. However, many of these methods are contrary to what the children experience outside of school.

The bottom line is that parents today are building the society which will take care of tomorrow. Will they have what it takes? Walsh states that “the future belongs to people who are willing to work hard and delay gratification – all the things that make up self-discipline. If we give kids too much and expect too little, we end up with kids who don’t have the inner strengths and resources to be happy and successful.”