

The Gentle No Phrase Guide

Say no with connection, not conflict.

1. “I won’t let you...”

- ✓ Use when a boundary is being crossed.
- ♦ “I won’t let you hit. I’m going to keep us both safe.”

2. “That’s not safe. Let’s try this instead.”

- ✓ Redirects without blame.
- ♦ “Climbing the table isn’t safe. Want to jump on the floor mat?”

3. “You’re upset. I hear you. The answer is still no.”

- ✓ Validates feelings, holds the boundary.
- ♦ “You’re mad we can’t have more candy. It’s okay to feel mad. The answer is no.”

4. “I know you really want to. It’s hard when we can’t.”

- ✓ Helps toddlers name disappointment.
- ♦ “You wanted to stay longer. That’s hard. It’s time to go.”

5. “You’re allowed to be upset. I’m here.”

- ✓ Encourages emotional safety.
- ♦ “It’s okay to cry. I’m not going anywhere.”

6. “I hear you. I’m still going to...”

- ✓ Gentle firmness without debate.
- ♦ “I hear you don’t want to nap. I’m still going to turn off the light now.”

7. “It’s okay to want that. It’s not something we’re doing today.”

- ✓ A firm limit without shame.
- ♦ “You want ice cream before dinner. Not today.”

8. “This is hard right now. Let’s take a breath together.”

- ✓ Models regulation instead of escalation.
- ♦ Use during early signs of frustration to avoid full meltdowns.

9. “We don’t do that. Let me show you another way.”

- ✓ Teaches appropriate behavior without punishment.
- ♦ “We don’t grab toys. Let’s ask, ‘Can I have a turn?’”

10. “You can feel mad. I won’t let you hurt.”

- ✓ Distinguishes between emotion and action.
- ♦ “You can stomp or squeeze your stuffy, but I won’t let you hit.”