

Teacher shares the 1 thing parents should make sure kids know before kindergarten

 www.today.com/parents/family/parents-teach-kids-no-kindergarten-rcna202578

April 25, 2025

How can parents really prepare their kids for kindergarten? Take advice from a teacher who says parents need to do one important thing: “Tell your kid no.”

“No’ is not a bad word,” Emily Perkins, a kindergarten teacher in Kentucky, tells [TODAY.com](https://www.today.com/parents/family/parents-teach-kids-no-kindergarten-rcna202578).

As Perkins, 28, explained in a [TikTok video](#), “A lot of people ask me all the time when they figure out that I’m a kindergarten teacher: What can they do to prepare their kid for kindergarten? What can I do — help them open their snacks? Help them tie their shoes? No, no, no, not that. Tell your kid, ‘No’ ... Tell them ‘No’ as a complete sentence.”

Perkins continued, “Do not teach them that telling them, ‘No’ invites them to argue with you, because if I can’t tell your child ‘No’ as an adult, and they don’t respect the ‘No,’ they’re basically unteachable. Let me tell you something: I will open their snacks, I will tie their shoes, I will help them blow their nose, I will teach them how to wash their hands properly.”

She joked, “I will put the Capri Sun straw in the non-existent hole of these new, 100% fruit juice Capri Suns — whatever they are. Let’s figure out a hole for that, OK, Capri Sun?”

“The term [gentle parenting](#) gets thrown around like a reward — ‘Congratulations, you’re a pushover,’” Perkins said in the video, adding, “You can validate your child’s feelings without being a pushover.”

“I heard a parent tell me that they don’t tell their child, ‘No’ because it triggers them,” Perkins said in the video.

“If you cannot tell your child, ‘No,’ your child’s teacher probably can’t tell them ‘No,’ either. And if your child’s teacher can’t tell them, ‘No,’ it’s really hard to help them learn,” she concluded.

Many on TikTok, including teachers, agreed with Perkins.

- “It’s actually non-parenting. That’s the problem.”
- “Fellow kindergarten teacher: Best advice ever. I have multiple students who melt down and argue ... when I tell them, ‘No.’”
- “This why I come home exhausted each day. Having 18 6-year-olds argue with me all day and then choose to ignore me and do whatever they want anyway is so tiring.”
- “Not everything needs to be a lesson. Sometimes, ‘Because I said so’ is a complete sentence.”

- “I teach first grade and my God, yes. Girl, I am TIRED.”
- “Gentle parenting and permissive parenting are two VERY different things! ... We can gentle parent and still say, ‘No.’”
- “Preschool teacher here. You are ... correct. Let them struggle a bit so they can ACTUALLY do hard things. Let them experience disappointment! Make them resilient!”
- “As a public Pre-K teacher, I can confirm. The number of kids that have not been told ‘No’ is astonishing. I put out fires all day long as a result.”

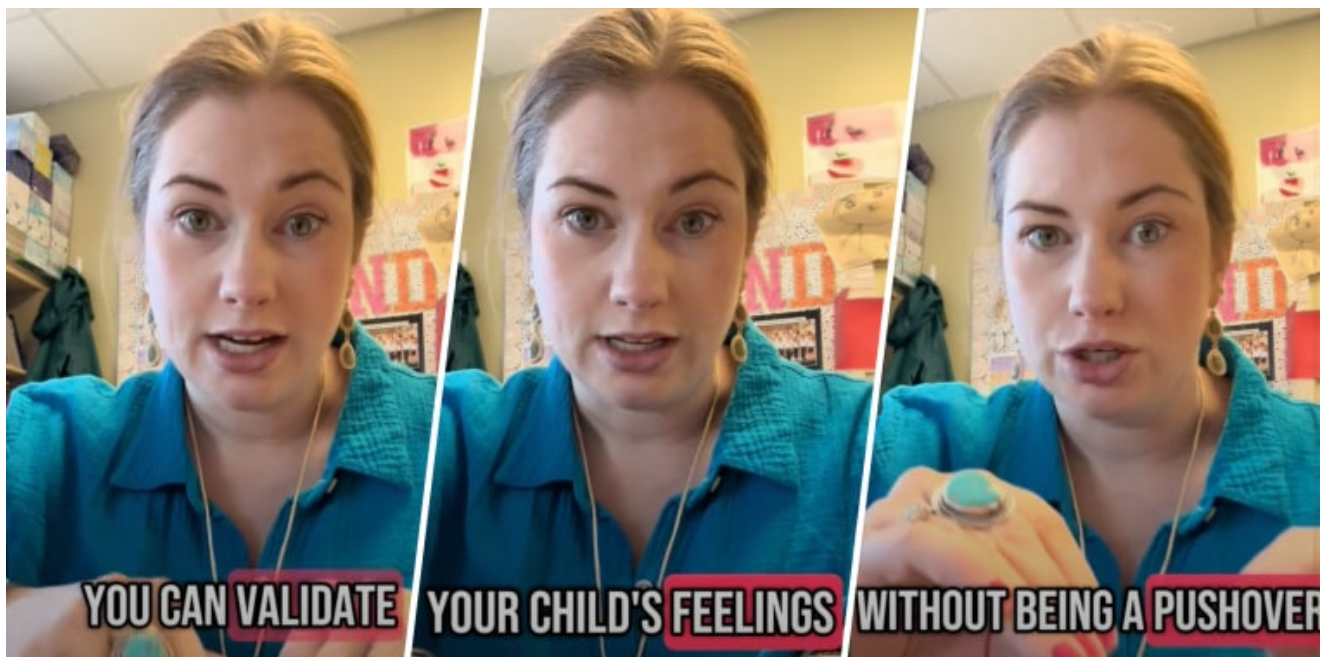
Perkins, a mother of two, tells TODAY.com that “no’ is not an invitation to an argument.”

Perkins explains why she can't always — and shouldn't have to — take time to spell out her reasoning for saying “no” to a child.

“My whole job is explaining,” Perkins jokes. “Think of logistics — if we’re lining up for a fire drill, it’s, ‘No, you may not stay inside if the building is on fire’ or ‘No, you may not climb on the table because it’s not safe.’”

Perkins says she children generally deserve an explanation for the “no” and she’s fond of circling back with students when there’s time for her to talk about the context.

“I love to explain why, but if I can’t right then, kids still have to hear and accept ‘no,’” she tells TODAY.com.



Emily Perkins, a kindergarten teacher in Kentucky, shares advice for parents in a video that's gone viral. @emmymckenny via Tiktok

The value in hearing ‘No’

Learning to respect the word “no” is an “essential skill for life,” according to Dr. Deborah Gilboa, family doctor and resilience expert.

Gilboa tells TODAY.com that some children struggle with being told “no” because, “It’s never meant ‘no’ before — it’s meant, ‘Ask me again’ or ‘I’ll whine until you give in.’”

Do kids have to love adhering to the word “no”? No! Responding to it properly, however, is important when starting elementary school.

“Kindergarten is often children’s first experience at being somewhere — not just for their care and feeding — but also their learning ... and having to meet metrics,” explains Gilboa.

Gilboa adds that educators generally care about helping children develop into people with whom other people want to socialize. Kindergarten teachers in particular are “experts” at consistency, she says. “That’s how they manage the behavior of a roomful of young children.” To deny kids reasonable expectations of the real world, says Gilboa, is unfair to them.

“If children have no practice at having limits set and held to expectations for good behavior and having consequences for breaking rules,” says Gilboa, “they’re going to struggle at school.”



[Elise Solé](#)

Elise Solé is an experienced writer and editor who specializes in parenting and pop culture for the TODAY audience. She’s a former New Yorker who lives in Los Angeles. She loves true crime shows, gummy candy of all types, running and hanging out with her son and husband.