TURNING PAGES, BUILDING FUTURES

LEARNING WHERE LIFE HAPPENS

When “No” Shows up Everywhere

Supporting participation without turning every request into a power struggle

Ready to jump in? Page 3 is the Choice Builder – pick one moment in your day and find one real choice your child can make.

Start Here

Every request has become a standoff. Getting dressed, leaving the park, starting schoolwork, turning off the tablet – somewhere along the way, “no” started showing up everywhere, and every day now feels like a negotiation you didn’t sign up for.

Maybe choices have backfired before – you offered your child a say, and it still turned into a meltdown. That doesn’t mean this approach failed. It means there’s information in the “no” we haven’t read yet. This guide will help you read it.

First, a reframe: a “no” can mean many different things. It can be preference (“I don’t want this”), uncertainty (“I don’t know what’s next”), difficulty (“this is too hard”), a need for control (“I want a say”), a request for more information (“what exactly is going to happen?”), or simply not wanting to stop. Same word, very different messages.

The big idea: More choice = More ways to participate.

When children feel they have no say in what happens, saying no may become their most reliable way to communicate a preference, express discomfort, or regain some control. Offering meaningful choices creates other ways to participate. Your child may not get to decide whether every necessary task happens, but they can have a real say in how, when, or with whom it happens. The goal isn’t to eliminate “no.” It’s to make room for more communication, flexibility, and shared participation.

Try This: pick a moment, make a small change

Whenever something genuinely has to happen, offer choices about how it happens.

Try: The choice is never “do you want to get dressed?” It’s “red shirt or dinosaur shirt?” “Do you want to start with the blocks or the books?” Choose what to use, where, which one first, who helps, or how to respond (by pointing, telling, or showing).

Keep expectations clear, concise, and consistent

Try: “Get ready to go” asks your child to guess. “Shoes on, then backpack” doesn’t. Say what will happen and in what order - use few words and the same ones each time.

Drop the demands that don’t need to be demands

Try: Before making a request, ask: does this actually need to happen right now, this way? Every unnecessary demand is another invitation to say no. Save your “has to” for the things that truly matter.

Build in yes moments and a sense of control

Try: If every interaction is a demand, “no” becomes your child’s only reliable source of control. Sprinkle the day with places where the answer is automatically yes - small jobs, real responsibilities, chances to be the one who decides.

Acknowledge the response before you redirect it

Try: "You don't want to stop. It's hard to leave." Naming what your child communicated doesn't agree with the no - it tells your child the message was received. Then move on: "It's time to go."

Make the next step predictable

Try: When presenting a request, let your child know what will happen and what comes afterward: "We're going to do five questions, then you can play." "First, put on your shoes, then we'll go outside." Knowing what's expected and what comes next can make it easier to get started and participate.

What to look for

You don't need to collect formal data to notice whether something is helping. Over a week or two, watch for:

- ☐ The "no" comes a beat later than usual - that pause is your child considering
- ☐ Your child picks between two options instead of refusing both
- ☐ A standoff ends in negotiation instead of a meltdown (or meltdown followed by negotiation)
- ☐ Your child tells you WHY - "I don't want to stop" - instead of just "no"
- ☐ Your child begins offering an alternative: "Two more minutes," "After snack," or "Help me."
- ☐ One moment in the day quietly gets easier

You don't need to see all six. One small change is information—and a place to build from.

If it doesn't work...

If a strategy flops the first time, that is not a verdict on your child - it is information. Try:

- If the choice itself becomes a battle, your child may need fewer options, not more – try two, or choose for them once and narrate the plan
- If every choice ends in a meltdown, the "no" might be communicating difficulty or uncertainty rather than a desire for more control – look at whether the task needs to be made easier
- If choices work at home but not in public, that's information about the setting, not the strategy – practice where it's easiest first
- If nothing shifts after a week or two, pick a different moment of the day – some routines carry more history than others
- If the "no" seems to be about not wanting to stop something enjoyable, a clear next step with something to look forward to will do more than any choice

Remember: *The goal isn't to win the "no." The goal is to build participation while making room for communication and choice.*

Want more practical ideas?

Get practical, doable strategies for teaching your own child at home - what to try next, how to break it down, and how to make it fit your family's routines. Explore PAGE Resources → Or, if you'd like occasional practical ideas delivered by email, **join the PAGE list at pageaba.com.**

Need help figuring out what to try?

If you've tried a few strategies, made adjustments, and still aren't sure what to change, PAGE Consulting can help. We provide individualized support to help families find practical ways to build communication, participation, learning, and independence into everyday life. **Learn more or schedule a consultation at pageaba.com.**

LEARNING WHERE LIFE HAPPENS

The Choice Builder

A one-page planner for finding real choices inside the moments that usually turn into standoffs.

Pick one moment where "no" shows up most. Find one thing your child CAN choose at that moment. Then notice what happens.

Consider routines such as getting dressed, transitioning from a preferred activity, starting schoolwork or chores, cleanup time, hygiene routines (bath, teeth, hair), and meals and snacks.

What needs to happen?	**What can my child choose?** (what to use · where · which one first · who helps · how to respond)	**What happened?**

Pick one moment. Offer one real choice. Notice what happens.