

HOW DO I GET MY CHILD TO RESPOND TO MY DIRECTIONS WHEN HE WANTS TO DO SOMETHING THAT IS NOT ACCEPTABLE?

This was a wonderful question posed by the Grandfather of a boy on the Autism Spectrum as he interacted with his grandson.

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April, 2012

There is a widely held perspectives on this, i.e., children with autism should be approached with one of two ways. They should be presented with demands/directives by either coming at them 'head on' or by demonstrating and with gentle prompting. Dr. Temple Grandin has said, "either the front door or the back door" and, I will add, you better know which approach is necessary otherwise you are in for quite a struggle.

Children with autism are typically operating emotionally at the 2 year level; they want to do things their way but do not necessarily have the skill sets to be successful..

Because of this it may require one to "come in the back door", i.e., giving the child the impression that he is 'in control', all the while guiding and directing the child's behavior through subtle prompting.

Sometimes it requires one to "come in the front door", occasionally in a very stern and direct manner to get their attention, but usually in a quiet/collaborative manner, making certain the child is attending to your directions all the while modeling appropriate behavior, e.g., picking up toys together with the child.

Either way you should **not tell the child what not to do** but rather **tell the child what to do**.

Children with autism generally suffer from poor executive functioning so they may not know what to do under certain circumstances. So merely telling them to "Stop" doing something or "No!" does not give them an alternative, successful response and so they become frustrated and angry and either run away from the experience or become oppositional and defiant, i.e., have meltdowns.

Telling a child with autism "No!" or "Stop that!" does not give them a response that would be acceptable. What it does do is expects them to **wait**; something that children with autism are known not to abide graciously.

In short, saying "No!" or placing demands on a child with autism [perceived by him as something he doesn't want to do or can't do] will often elicit a reaction, sometimes a rage reaction called a 'Meltdown', that can last for a long period of time; sometimes hours.

More mild mannered children with autism will withdraw or depart from the frustrating conditions.

To make matters even more *exciting*, you may have to 'change up' your approach if the child's motivation[s] changes from one of achieving a goal to one of attention seeking.

This is why raising a child with autism does not come 'naturally' to a parent and, so, training and ongoing gaining of information regarding autism is ubiquitous to successful parenting of such children.

Suffice it to say that most children with autism tend to respond more favorably to a collaborative and visual prompting approach to demand situations but you will probably sense that no matter if he is a “front door child” or a “back door child” he wants to feel in control nonetheless.