

# Fix the Nix-Master to Say "Yes" Faster

No adult ever won a power struggle with a kid, and no adult ever will. The minute you get into a power struggle with a child, you've already lost. Take your "sails" out of their "wind". Do not get caught in "Yes, you will", "No, I won't" battles. Instead, choose interventions that work around the resistance

Nearly nonstop nay-saying is a normal part of development that prepares teens to become independent. Here are techniques to use with youth who evidence normal non-compliance, and those who use behaviors that go well beyond "typical" into seriously defiant:



## Terrific Nopes-Busting Techniques



### Be Democratic

Who would you work harder for— the boss who was a dictator or the boss who was a participatory manager? Most of us, whether adults or kids, want to have a say at work or school. Allowing youth input prepares them for the self-management they must do throughout life and when adults aren't present to regulate behavior.

*Strategies:* To win a great prize, have students to play Tic Tac Toe without rules. They will discover that games won't work without rules. Now, have a classroom without rules and a defiant youth as teacher. Role reversals offer fast ways for defiant youth to get a jolting look at their own problem behavior.



### Peer Power

Teens may discard adult comments, but consider peer input.

*Strategies:* Allow peers to suggest solutions to incidents of defiance that involve them. Ask your group to identify jobs and businesses an adult can do and be defiant whenever they want; there are none.



### Give a Perspective

Defying authorities can become the top issue above all else.

*Strategies:* Ask students to list the most important things they want in life. Defying authority will not be listed. Identify to defiant students that they devote much time and energy to a low priority while jeopardizing their top goals. Have students cross out goals that defiance could ruin.



### Give Guidelines

Especially students from troubled homes, will have little idea of how often it is okay to be non-compliant.

*Strategies:* Ask your class to establish a guideline for how often students should decline tasks or challenge authority. Assist the students to craft a guideline that would work in the job setting, then ask the class members to confront each other on excessive non-compliance.



### If Everybody Just Says "No"

Help students realize that compliance is not arbitrary but essential.

*Strategies:* Ask the students to determine the consequences if everyone was non-compliant whenever they wished. Ask what would happen if everybody ignored stop signs, took every item they wanted, blocked traffic, refused to pay taxes, or could enter your house without your okay?

# Why Some Kids Just Say "No"

Seriously defiant kids may come from homes struggling with major problems. Here's why they're defiant, and what you can do.

**DO**

**Avoid Battles for Control** At home, the child may have discovered that defiance can sometimes lessen the chance of a beating or sexual assault. The child learns that seizing control can sometimes moderate frightening events. They will do almost anything to keep control. **DO:** Avoid wrenching control. Ask the child for solutions, teach compromise. Stress you are on the child's side.

**DON'T**

**Assume Compliance Skills** Children from homes affected by problems like domestic violence or substance abuse, may learn yelling and fighting but not basic compliance skills. **DON'T:** Assume every child has the skills, attitude and motivation to comply. You may have to teach that before they can do it.

**DO**

**Expect Incremental Change** The defiant child is afraid to release control because at home when control is relaxed, sometimes scary things happen. **DO:** Say that you won't yank control so the child can relax. Align with the child. Say that you don't expect rapid change; most children are more likely to make changes when not feeling pressured or cornered.

**DON'T**

**Forget Conduct Disorders** Extremely defiant youth are sometimes conduct disorders who lack remorse or conscience. In mainstream settings, they're the 1% of your kids that can take 99% of your time. **DON'T:** Forget that many common techniques don't work with conduct disorders who are motivated by getting "what I want". Set stiff consequences for defiance. Teach compliance skills and the benefits of complying. Learn about this population.

## How to Succeed in Life Without Defying

**Address Underlying Anger:** It's easy to overlook the causes of extreme defiance, yet addressing the underlying source may be more effective than just confronting the outward symptoms. Kids don't act seriously defiant without a reason. By easing their anger, animosity or hopelessness, you can often ease the intensity or frequency of chronic defiance.

**Use Acceptance:** Youth have only three ways to respond when given an adult directive. One response is to become oppositional, or they can capitulate. These responses are problematic and should be avoided. Strive instead to elicit acceptance. Like you, youth work best at tasks they accept, compared to those they fight or feel coerced into doing.

**Teach About "Yes":** Teach kids they can best get authorities to do what they want not by resisting, but by using answers that begin with "yes." Portray "yes" as the magic word teachers and parents seldom hear, that can be very powerful.

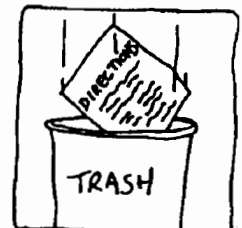
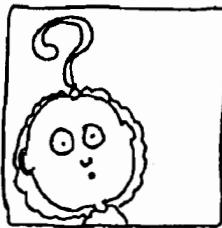
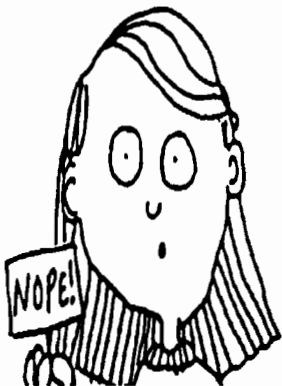
**Teach Compromise:** Many severely oppositional youth are global thinkers, viewing situations in black and white, all-or-nothing terms. Show youth the middle ground, and ask them to identify compromises rather than just say "no".

**Keep the Adults Neutral:** Teens may rebel against anything adults say. When an adult takes a stand, it will often spark opposition. For important insights, avoid initially voicing a position. Instead, assist peers to voice the view; their opinion may receive consideration.

**Use Humor:** It's hard to stay angry in the face of humor. Assist youth to develop compromises when they claim to be unable. Suggest ridiculous compromises to relax and jolly them into identifying solutions. Offer silly suggestions they could modify to be reasonable: "I think you should do 2,000 extra pages of homework...or, perhaps you could come up with a better idea?"

## Teach Alternatives to Defying Directions

*You Don't Want to Do It    You Don't Know How to Do it    You Think the Direction is Wrong*



*Instead of "no," teach youth to say "yes" then state concerns, such as these common problems following directions*