Everything—every single thing—we do or think takes energy. Easy to see...right? But everything we do or think also releases energy. When you are in a good mood, for example, people around you can tell. They can feel it. Likewise, when you are crabby or angry, people know it, and you don’t even have to say anything.

The energy of yes and no also carries energy. When you ask for help and someone responds with yes, it feels good. When they say no, it feels not-so-good. Likewise, when someone asks you for help, it feels good to say yes, partly because you can tell that it makes them happy, but also because it feels good to help. Every energy you emit in your speech, attitude, and actions is like your own personal PR campaign, and people can tell when you feel good or bad. Mostly, though, the shared energy that comes from the recipient of the yes is enough for everyone to feel good.
I am always puzzling over why parents say no to their children. I hear and read from them that “parents make the rules” and “no one should always get what they want”; that “kids will get spoiled” and “kids need to learn discipline by learning the word ‘no’.” There are plenty more justifications and rationalizations out there, but that’s a sampling. Given the energy associated with the words “no” and “yes,” I wonder if parents realize that every time they say no to their child they are sending a little electric shock of sorts to him, that hurts…and leaves him wondering on an emotional, psychological and even physical level why his parent just hurt him. Isn’t he supposed to feel love and support and nurturing from his parent? Hurt? Why did my parent just hurt me? (This is true not just for children, of course, but for and between adults, too.)

From birth onward, I trust that whenever my child asks for a thing, it is a genuine and valid request, one that is necessary for her development. It’s not my job to figure out why she asked for it, or what purpose it will serve. It’s my job as a mom to get to yes. I really want yes to be my goal, because I know how good yes feels, and I want my child to immerse herself in a daily shower of feeling good…about life, about herself, about her developing abilities, about the predictions she forms about how the world works, and about others.

For the confused, let’s dissect a few examples of how to get to yes. Because there have to be exceptions, right? No, there really don’t.

1) When my child says he wants to be Superman and fly off the roof, I connect easily with the feeling he wants to achieve: flying! We would all love to fly, right? Most of us, anyway. Now I know—or think I know—that he can’t actually fly off the roof...so I am not going to say something totally disrespectful and hideous, like, “You can’t fly off the roof, you’d kill yourself.” My goal is getting to yes so he can revel in the power of creating a world of allowance. I want him to experience flying, so I am going to act as his partner to get there.

I might offer to make him a cape so he can run through the house, pretending to fly. I might suggest that he prepare for jumping off the roof by holding on to my hand and jumping off a chair and then a table. Then he can try it alone. Chances are, by that time he will have learned pretty solidly what gravity feels like as his feet hit the ground. (Depending upon the age and
readiness of the child, we might also have had a discussion of gravity and done some other experiments, too.)

In my experience I’ve never had a child want to jump off a roof after getting this far, because they will have already figured out that splat wouldn’t feel so good. For the sake of this discussion, however, let’s pretend that the child still wants to jump off the roof and fly, even after experimenting with jumping off of tables and such. You still have options. How about a zip line? How about a low roof and an air mattress to fall onto? How about a trampoline? How about a ride in a helicopter, a hot air balloon or an airplane? Just imagine how exciting, how powerful, and how good he’ll feel when you help make his fantasy come true!

2) When my teenage son was in public school (his choice), he was required to take a speech class. He didn’t like it, and was quite shy and very uncomfortable getting up in front of the class to say anything. His teacher called me to tell me she was going to have to fail him if he could not give a speech, and asked me, please, couldn’t I coerce or bribe or threaten him to do it, so she could give him a good grade? No, I told her, under no circumstances would I dream of asking my teen to do something he did not want to do. She was stunned. She failed him. My son is now not only a very confident public speaker, but a clear and impassioned orator, confident in front of an audience of any size.

3) My 6-month-old granddaughter was visiting recently, and she loves to put everything in her mouth. This is the main way babies connect with their world at her age, so I get it, even though it sort of grosses me out. I had her at the kitchen sink and she was playing with the water coming out of the faucet. She saw the kitchen sponge and grabbed it. It was headed to her mouth. “Eek!” I wanted to shout. “No, not that! You can’t put that nasty thing in your mouth!” I knew she was super eager; it had a fabulous texture and was all juicy with water for sucking. I didn’t open my mouth, however. I just removed the sponge from her hand before it hit her mouth and headed to the cupboard for a brand new sponge. Easy. She was happy.

I have learned from my children that when they learn that they control their own worlds—not Mom or Dad or someone else—they never reach this much-feared “spoiled” stage. When they are nurtured in a world that teaches them that they always get what they want, their needs will always be genuine and not arbitrary or manipulative, and never ploys for attention or love. I have also learned that when they achieve confidence at a very young age that they can partner with Mom or Dad all the time to get their needs, wishes and desires met, that they want the same for me. They’re helpful, respectful, loving children that understand that I have needs, too.
What a miracle! And it’s all so easy, really it is.

Disclaimer: I was not always this good of a parent. My learning curve was pretty steep most of the time, but I screwed up, too. I am still learning!