

# PORTLAND

*lifestyle & family*

FATHERHOOD / MOTHERHOOD / PARENTING / AUGUST 1, 2016

## Ask Ariel: Too Much Tickling



Dear Ariel,

My husband likes to roughhouse with our 3-year-old daughter and 5-year-old son. Their play is often quite physical and I hear lots of "No Daddy, don't tickle me," and "Daddy, stop. I don't like that." But in the midst of play, my husband continues to tickle and wrestle with our kids to the point the kids often come crying to me. I have tried to talk with him about this but he doesn't seem to be able to stop and doesn't understand why it is important to listen to what our kids are saying. What should I do?

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## -Stop the Tickle Monster

Dear STTM,

You are right to be concerned about the physical play that your husband is engaging in with your children. It's great that you have begun the conversation with him about respecting the bodies and words of your children.

Playing physically with our kids is a great joy and a very typical way that fathers create intimacy with their children. I also want to point out that there is nothing inherently wrong with this kind of play. What is very important is that we teach our children that when they say "no," or "stop it," or "I don't like when you tickle me," their words are respected immediately, even if it means the end of a fun wrestling session. From an early age, we learn whether or not what we have to say about our own bodies is listened to by others. When "no" is ignored, the power of "no" is lessened to the point of uselessness.

Children need to know—and parents need to respect—that "no" means "no."

I would also like to point out the importance of gender differences in physical play. Our sons need to learn to respect the words of others. When your son watches his father continue to tickle his sister to the point of tears, he is learning that it is okay to touch a girl until she cries. This early learning could set the stage for a young man who doesn't pick up on cues in a sexual situation. We need to teach our boys how to respect the limits of others, and that their own limits are respected, too. Your daughter also needs to know that the first male figure in her life listens to and respects her body. This will help her have a stronger sense of self and empower her to take care of her body when she faces sexual situations in adolescence and beyond. I hope your husband learns that his physical play today is setting the groundwork for how your children set physical boundaries in the future.

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