

- Written by Jessica Thyriar
- Illustrated by Arumitha Sasiharan and Azadeh Pourashraf

# It's Okay to Say NO



A book by A.N.B.U. (அன்பு)



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Written by Jessica Thyriar  
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For every child learning to trust their voice—  
This book is for you.  
May you always know that your “no” is powerful,  
your boundaries are important,  
and your feelings deserve to be heard.  
To the grown-ups reading along:  
thank you for nurturing spaces  
where little voices can grow brave,  
honest, and free.  
And most especially, to Ariyan and Anbu—  
the newest members of the crew  
who helped shape these stories from the inside out.  
This book carries your spirit on every page.



## **Book Information**

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**Contact Information:** ask@anbu.ca

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Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons — living or dead — is purely coincidental. For permission requests, please contact: Jessica Thyriar at ask@anbu.ca

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## **Credits:**

Written by Jessica Thyriar

Illustrated by Arumitha Sasiharan and Azadeh Pourashraf

Edits and contributions made by Arumitha Sasiharan and Swetha Ranganathan



*It's Okay to Say No*  
A book by A.N.B.U.

Dear Parents and Caregivers,

Teaching our children about bodily autonomy is one of the most important lessons we can share with them. It helps them understand that they have control over their own bodies, recognize and respect boundaries, and build a strong sense of personal safety and self-worth.

This book introduces the concept of bodily autonomy, especially in relation to food, and presents ideas about consent and choice in a way that's easy for kids to understand. Reading this book together can open up great conversations, help answer your child's questions, and reinforce these vital lessons in everyday life.

**Flip to the back of the book for a few gentle reflection questions you can explore with the child before reading, and some simple ways to revisit the story's ideas together afterward.**







Today was Sophia and Kaia's birthday party.

It was a special day, for a year older they would be!



Nora, Sage and Laya  
were so excited to go.

They went as fast as they could,  
with their parents in tow.



When they walked in, everyone  
squealed and started hugging each  
other and....



Sage and Nora spread their arms  
wide to greet their friends.





*But* Laya stood there, scared and uncomfortable, by the door.

*A*mma looked at her and said  
“You are in charge. It’s okay to say no.”

Laya smiled and said,  
“Amma, I don’t want to hug anyone.”

Amma said “That’s fine, little bun!”

With that, her friends all understood,  
and said, “Okay!”

“Instead,” they said. “Laya, come play!”









Hours passed with lots of fun.  
They skipped and shared, and  
laughed a ton.



Then Appa called, "Sophia, Kaia,  
Sage, Nora, Laya, it's time to eat!"

So they all cleaned up and ran to  
grab a seat.



An Auntie was helping put food on the plates.  
The flavours and colours were simply great.

There was sooru, sambar, peruppu, and more.  
Idiappam, sothi, Tamil dishes galore!





Nora looked over to Appa in a sad mood.  
Appa said to Nora, “It’s okay to say no if you don’t want  
this food.”

Nora then looked to Sage,  
she didn’t want to speak.

So Sage stepped up and said,  
“Aunty, I don’t think Nora wants puttu to eat!”



Nora shook her head at Sage and smiled.

The Aunty stopped and asked, "So what would you like, kunchu?"  
Nora replied, "More curry please, and sooru!"



The best part of the party was here,  
it was time to cut the cake!

All the kids lined up on both sides and smiled for  
pictures that Appa was going to take!

Everyone was screaming  
“Happy Birthday to Sophia,  
Happy Birthday to Kaia”

Kaia was so excited to cut cake and  
blow out her candles.







*A*s soon as Kaia cut the cake,  
she wanted to take a big bite.

But someone asked her to wait!



*I*t was tradition in their home,  
for the guest to line up, one by one,  
and feed a mouthful of cake  
to the special birthday person.

Everyone was going to start feeding her!  
And Kaia was upset.  
She didn't want to upset anyone else,  
but she didn't want to be fed!



Nora said to Kaia,  
“It’s okay to say no if you don’t want to be fed.”

So Kaia said  
“Appa I don’t want to be fed,  
I want to eat the slice of cake all by myself!”

Appa said “Of course dear,  
that’s okay!”

Kaia was having a great birthday.





The party was over and it was time to go home.  
Everyone waved goodbye to the others by the door..







That is when Sophia's  
friend Dinesh  
came over and said,


"Hey Sophia, Is it true?  
I heard you say no to  
people older than you!

How are you allowed to  
say no to older people?"









Sophia said,  
“My Aunt told me that it’s always important  
to say no when you’re uncomfortable.”

“Whether it’s someone you know or do not know,  
Even if they’re older, it’s okay to say no!”



Sage chimed in,  
“If someone doesn’t respect your “No”,

Talk with a trusted adult and tell them what’s happening.  
And they will help you - that’s how it should go!”





*L*aya, Nora and Kaia cheered together and said,  
“Always remember, it’s okay to say no!”





# Glossary

Amma: Mother or mom

Appa: Father or dad

Sooru: Cooked rice

Sambar: Spicy lentil-based soup often eaten with rice

Peruppu: Cooked lentil dish

Idiappam: Steamed rice noodle dish

Sothi: Coconut milk based gravy usually eaten with rice

Puttu: Steamed rice cake

Kunchu: Endearing term for daughter or little girl



# Questions for Parents and Caregivers to discuss with the child before Reading

## **1. My Body, My Choice**

- Who gets to decide what happens to your body?
- Is it okay to say “no thank you” to something you don’t like or don’t want?

## **2. Understanding Boundaries**

- Who gets to decide what happens to your body?
- Is it okay to say “no thank you” to something you don’t like or don’t want?
- What does it mean when someone says “stop” or “no”?
- Can you think of a time you didn’t feel comfortable with something, like a game, a hug, or a food?

## **3. Respecting Others**

- How can we be kind when a friend says “no”?
- What should we do if someone doesn’t want to be touched or doesn’t want to play a certain way?

## **4. Listening to Your Feelings**

- How can you tell when something doesn’t feel good or makes you uncomfortable?
- What are some words you can use to tell a grown-up or friend how you feel?



# Questions for Parents and Caregivers to discuss with the child after Reading

## **1. Thinking About the Story**

- What did you learn about saying “no” when something doesn’t feel right?
- Can you remember a time in the story when someone listened and respected another person’s “no”?

## **2. Using What We Learned**

- What can you say if you don’t feel like hugging, playing, or eating something?
- How do you show others what your boundaries are?

## **3. When Things Feel Uncomfortable**

- What should you do if someone doesn’t listen when you say “no”?
- Who are the safe grown-ups you can talk to if something doesn’t feel good?

## **4. Keeping the Conversation Going**

- How can we keep talking as a family about listening to our bodies and our feelings?
- What can we do at home to make sure everyone feels safe and respected?



It's important to encourage children to use their voice and say “no” when something feels wrong or uncomfortable—including with food. At the same time, this story opens the door to help children understand that some foods help their bodies grow strong and healthy, even if they're not always their favorite.

Use this opportunity to talk about the difference between choosing what feels okay and nourishing our bodies. The goal is to empower children while supporting healthy habits through gentle, respectful conversations.

By creating space for these talks before and after reading, you're building trust, encouraging confidence, and helping your child grow into someone who feels safe setting—and respecting—boundaries.



## **About the Author**

Jessica Thyriar is a dedicated mother, passionate advocate against gender-based violence, and a proud Tamil woman. While I authored this book, it would not have reached its full potential without the invaluable contributions of my amazing colleagues at Abuse Never Becomes Us. Heartfelt thanks to Jenny, Tharsi, Shajini, Subani, Tharani, Abithiny and Swetha for believing in this vision and for their thoughtful edits that serve our community.

## **About A.N.B.U.**

Abuse Never Becomes Us (A.N.B.U.), அன்பு, is a Toronto-based charity. We were founded in 2016 with a vision for a future where Tamil people who have been impacted by childhood sexual abuse can find their voice. Our mission is to provide healing and empowerment through holistic support, resources, and advocacy on behalf of Tamil people who have been impacted by childhood sexual abuse. To learn more, visit [www.anbu.ca](http://www.anbu.ca) or follow us on Instagram: @abuseneverbecomes





At Sophia and Kaia's birthday party, friends laugh, play and enjoy delicious Tamil food—but most importantly, they learn something truly special: it's okay to say no. Whether it's saying no to a hug, food they don't want to eat, or a tradition that makes them uncomfortable, Laya, Nora, Kaia, and their friends support each other in listening to their feelings and using their voices. Through kind conversations and caring adults, the kids discover that consent, boundaries, and respect belong at every celebration.

A joyful story about friendship, culture, and the power of saying “no” with confidence and love. Perfect for kids, parents, and educators alike, this heartwarming tale empowers young readers to speak up, support each other, and know that their voice matters.



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