

Family Times

NEWSLETTER



A NEWSLETTER FOR ADULTS WITH CHILDREN AGES 5-8

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Setting Limits

Parents set rules that are limits they expect a child to follow. Limits or rules help children learn skills and behaviors to live successfully in society. The challenge is to set limits in such a way that children learn to solve their own problems, control their own behavior, cooperate, and accept increasing responsibility.

Setting rules or limits is easier if the parents understand their own behavior. Parents are constantly making choices for themselves and their children.



Just as adults resist doing things, so do children. Adults can refuse to eat a certain food or can decide to do household chores at a later date. Children are learning to become individuals. They often do this by resisting requests from parents. In addition, things that parents often expect their children to do are not seen as important by the child.

For example, keeping the house clean or coming to dinner on time. Parents can help by providing choices. "Do you want to eat dinner at 6:00 or 6:30?" "What do you want to do first, take out the trash or do the dishes?" Allowing children to make choices leads to independence.

Why Children Need Limits

Children need limits or rules just as much as they need food and shelter. Children raised without limits may withdraw and be unable to make decisions, or they may give in to peer pressure. Others may deliberately misbehave to see who is watching and who will provide the limits. It is

normal for children to test the limits, although this behavior often frustrates or annoys to parents. Children need and expect secure boundaries or limits to feel safe. Testing rules helps children build confidence and assures them that someone cares about them.

Limits Versus Punishment

Children from ages 5 through 8 are learning to reason and becoming responsible for their actions. Letting a child reason with you gives the child practice in learning to listen, think, and predict what will happen because of the behavior. Resentment and anger can result from authority or punishment imposed unreasonably.

Children this age are beginning to "decide" and are able to stick to a plan both of you agree to. Children can reason with a parent and can compromise, although they may not want to change their mind. During the reasoning or negotiating process, the child may try hard to hold his own with a parent: "But Mom . . . but Mom." Children also will learn how to say no from time to time as they negotiate rules. As teens, their ability to say no will be more important when they face choices about drugs, alcohol, and sexuality.

When Are Limits Reasonable?

Parents are the best persons to decide limits because they know their child best. Children mature at different rates. This means your first child could play in the yard and not run into the street at a certain age, but your second child may not be able to handle that responsibility at that age. This is perfectly normal.

How Can Limits Be Set?

- Limits are more useful if they are consistent. Under stress, parents may become inconsistent. Be honest with the child. "Yes, I let you do it yesterday and it was a mistake. We're not going to start this."
- Rules are more likely to work when the child helps make them. Talking with the child about a certain limit may result in the rule staying the same. Listening to the child's concerns may cause the child to cooperate although the rule wasn't changed. Children learn problem-solving and decision-making skills when they help set rules.
- Involving the child in setting rules means learning to ask "what" and "how" questions. "What was our agreement?" "What can you do to help clean up the house so we can go to the ball game?" These questions usually invite children to help instead of resist.
- If a child is misbehaving, ask him or her to stop and talk about the rule he or she is breaking. Ask "What does it mean to play in the yard?" The child may see a different yard boundary than you do. "What does it mean to take out the garbage?" Listen to understand what the child means.

Children progress through the same growth stages but at different ages. Too many limits are stifling and prevent a child from learning on his or her own. Review limits to see if new ones need to be set and old ones dropped. Reasonable limits allow a child to succeed.

Nonnegotiable Limits

Some limits cannot be changed because of safety. Children need safe, secure boundaries as they develop. They may have a temper tantrum, but you can gently restate the boundaries. Explain the why behind the limit. "Because I said so" may cause the child to challenge the limit. Explain why "you are not allowed to run into the street to get a ball." Talk about how to get the ball such as asking an adult to get it. As the child gets older and can understand the dangers, limits may be changed.

Following Through With Limits

Follow through is very important. Parents may think the child is irresponsible if he doesn't follow the agreed-upon rule. Children do not have the same priorities as adults, so it is the parent's job to follow through. Decide what you will do when limits are not followed, instead of what you will make the child do. "I will drive as soon as seat belts are buckled." "I will wash only clothes that are in the laundry basket." If you say it,

mean it. If you mean it, follow through with action that is firm and kind. If children are fighting in the car, pull over and read a magazine. They will soon quit if you don't say a word. The less you say, the more children will listen.

References

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Positive Parenting Practices, WVU Extension Service, Morgantown, WV.

Parents Plus Web Page, www.parentingqa.com/cgi-bin/detail/sleep/nightmares.

Setting Limits With Children. Positive Discipline Catalog, Empowering People, Fall 1998.



The Book Nook

Gregory the Terrible Eater
by Mitchell Sharmat

My Many Colored Days
by Dr. Seuss

The Quarreling Book
by Charlotte Zolotow

Words Are Not for Hurting
by Elizabeth Verdick

are some good books
to read with your child.

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