

**Parenting Education and Family Engagement***Working together to help students be successful in school.*

## Take Home Tips

### Setting Limits for Positive Discipline

When you set limits for your children, you demonstrate your love and concern. Setting limits tells a child, “I care about you, I want you to be safe. I want you to act responsibly so that you will learn to get along happily with others.”

#### What limits should I set?

Carefully select the limits you think are necessary and, as much as possible, consider the child's point of view. The limits set should

- Protect children from physical harm
- Protect property
- Protect children and others from psychological harm

#### Limit your limits

Before you set a limit, ask yourself: “Is this rule really important? Am I willing to deal with the conflicts that will occur if my child disregards the limit?” Your rules should reflect your deeply held convictions or values, ones that you are committed to keeping. Parents who set too many rules can overwhelm their children with too many demands. You are more likely to be effective if you focus on those rules you believe are most important.

#### Set reasonable limits

You also need to consider whether your children are able to do what is expected of them. It is not reasonable, for example, to demand that toddlers keep their rooms clean or to expect boisterous 10-year-olds to always remember their mealtime manners. Forbidding a child to wet the bed during the night is unreasonable at any age because children have no control over their bladders while they sleep. Denying a child the right to experience emotions such as anger and fear may be unreasonable because these feelings are often natural, healthy responses to difficult situations. You can judge whether a limit is unreasonable by observing the way your children act. They may try their best but still fail, or they may show no sign of being able to perform the task. With this in mind, set limits so your children can succeed. Then gradually raise your expectations so they can continue to be successful.

#### Be clear and positive

State your limits clearly and simply. A clear limit tells a child exactly what is expected and when. If you tell your grade-schooler: “Every night, right after supper, you are to take the garbage, put it in the trash can outside, and make sure the lid is closed,” your child knows exactly what to do. In



contrast, saying “Clean up everything after supper” is vague. Your child may not know exactly what is expected. Limits will also be more effective if they emphasize the possible – if they tell a child what to do rather than what not to do. To give your child a better understanding of what is allowed as well as what the limits are, say “Play in the yard, not in the street” instead of just saying “Don’t go in the street.”

When children become angry and act destructively, parents are likely to think first of negative limits: “Don’t talk to me like that!” “Don’t hit your brother!” “Don’t throw things!” But children also need positive limits to help them deal with their emotions. Besides the “don’ts,” a parent might also say, “When you get angry, tell me how you feel – say you’re angry!” This shows a child another way of handling anger.

### **Be consistent**

Limits must be consistently applied and enforced. Children are more likely to respect limits when they realize their parents mean what they say. If you expect your children to wash their hands before meals, you must maintain this limit every day. If you tell your children not to play in a neighbor’s yard, it must be clear that this limit applies every time they are outside. However, limits can, and should, be revised if circumstances change. Consistent limits are dependable. They provide security and direction for children. A child’s respect for parents and for authority in general is likely to diminish if parents keep changing the rules and are inconsistent in enforcing limits. Once a limit is set, the child should know clearly when it applies.

### **Let children help set limits**

The ultimate goal in setting limits is to help children develop self-control and self-direction. You can show confidence in your children’s abilities by talking with them about problems and by encouraging them to suggest guidelines for their own behavior. By involving your children in setting limits, you are more likely to gain their cooperation in following the rule. Letting children help set their own limits also provides them with experience and practice in decision making.

Source: Pitzer, Ronald L., Family Sociologist and Professor – Family Social Science  
Retrieved from: <https://extension.umn.edu/encouraging-respectful-behavior/setting-limits-responsive-discipline>

### **Parenting Education and Family Engagement**

[PreKtoGrade3@ahschools.us](mailto:PreKtoGrade3@ahschools.us)  
[ahschools.us/PreKtoGrade3](https://ahschools.us/PreKtoGrade3)