

**T**he power of self-control is the power to assert oneself in a positive way. It involves the capacities to regulate oneself. Giving children the opportunity to learn self-responsibility and self-control is driven by parental response. This procedure helps children learn they are responsible for their own choices and behaviors and the outcomes associated with them.



**Kay Sudekum Trotter, PhD** provides personalized counseling services for children, adolescents, adults, couples, and entire families. Kay has extensive experience counseling those who are wrestling with abuse, trauma, grief, depression, divorce, and emotional or behavioral disorders. Much of her focus includes Play Therapy as well as Equine Assisted Counseling.

## Teach Children Self-Control and Self-Responsibility



### Dr. Kay Sudekum Trotter COUNSELING SERVICES

Licensed Professional Counselor Supervisor  
National Certified Counselor  
Registered Play Therapist  
Certified Equine Assisted Counselor

3535 Firewheel Drive, Suite B  
Flower Mound, TX 75028  
214-513-2111

[kay@kaytrotter.com](mailto:kay@kaytrotter.com)

[www.kaytrotter.com](http://www.kaytrotter.com)

Dr. Kay Sudekum Trotter  
COUNSELING SERVICES

## Effective Discipline with Choice Giving

Dr. Garry Landreth, founder of the Center for Play Therapy, developed the A • C • T method to setting limits and choice giving that provides children with an opportunity to learn self-control, the knowledge that they have choices, what making choices feels like, and how responsibility feels.<sup>1</sup> This approach to giving children choices helps children become invested, self-motivated individuals.

Parents can teach their children self-control and self-discipline by guiding them in ways that support their growth and development. Discipline is ongoing and changes, as children grow older. The limits and choices one has for young children are not, and should not be, the same as the limits and choices set for teenagers. The following discipline technique can help children develop self-responsibility and control. Giving them the tools they will need to make healthy choices through out life.

## Choice Giving

### Choice

*"If you choose to [continue action],  
then you choose [consequence]"*

### Consequence

*"You chose [consequence]."*

### Reflection

*That showed [attribute]."  
"You feel..."*



## FIRST:

### A • C • T Limit Setting Steps

After going through the A • C • T Limit Setting Steps, DON'T discuss anything with your child, simply say

*"I can tell you'd like to discuss this  
some more, but I've already answered you."*

If you're undecided and open to persuasion:

*I don't know...Let's sit down and discuss it.*

If you're not prepared to answer the question (e.g. you want to talk it over with someone, you want to get more information, or you want to think about it), say something like this:

*"I can't answer that question now...[because].  
I'll let you know [specific time]."*

If your child asks the same question again, calmly say:

*"I've already answered that question"  
"The answer I gave you a few minutes ago when  
you asked the same question is still the same."*

*[Child answers] "I don't remember."*

*[Your response] "It is your responsibility to remember."*

*"You're hoping I will change my mind. I haven't."*

If you think your child doesn't understand, calmly say:

*"I've already answered that question, you must  
have some questions about the answer."*

## SECOND:

### How to Effectively Give Your Child Choices

Use choice giving only after limit setting has been crossed

**THREETIMES.** Always clearly state choice. The consequence of the choice should be natural or logical — not punishment

- Give young children small choices
- Give older/mature children bigger choices
- Choices must be acceptable to you, relevant and enforceable
- Choices need to be phrased positively

Clearly state chosen consequence. Follow though with consequence without fail and without anger. Toy removal consequences is for today only. For young children each day should be a chance for a fresh start. Reflect the child's choice. Make a facilitative observation of self-control or any movement toward self-control. Reflect feelings of the child (e.g. proud, angry, etc.)

## Choices need to be phrased positively

*"If you choose to keep putting your shoes on the couch, then  
you choose to take them off."*

*"If you choose to stop putting your shoes on the couch, then you  
choose to keep them on."*

*"If you choose to play with markers, then you  
choose to play on the drop cloth"*

*"If you choose to put the markers down, then you  
choose to play anywhere in here."*

## Choice-Giving Sequence

### EXAMPLE 1

*I see you are very angry, but the toy is not for kicking, [point]  
the shoe box is."*

Child kicks the toy fourth time

*If you choose to kick the toy, then you choose  
not to play with it any more today."*

*If you choose to stop kicking the toy, then you  
choose to keep playing with it."*

Child kicks the shoe box instead

*You chose to kick the shoe box. That shows self control, especially  
when you feel so angry!*

### EXAMPLE 2

*I see you are very angry, but the toy is not for kicking, [point]  
the shoe box is."*

Child kicks the toy again

*You chose to stop playing with the toy today.  
You may play with it tomorrow."*

### EXAMPLE 3

*I see you are very angry, but the toy is not for kicking, [point]  
the shoe box is."*

Child instead of kicking toy again, the child nudges toy  
toward you with toe reluctantly,

*You stopped yourself from kicking it. Pushing it  
instead of kicking it shows self-control."*

<sup>1</sup>Source: Landreth (2002). Play Therapy: The Art of the Relationship. Burnner/Routledge, NY:NY.