

Your love and approval is the most important thing to your child. Because of this need for your love, your child will want to respond and meet your expectations. It is important that limit setting is a carefully thought-out procedure, one that is designed to convey understanding, acceptance and responsibility to your child.



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.

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**Effective
Discipline With
Limit Setting**



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Before children can resist

their first impulses, they must have an awareness of their behavior; a feeling of responsibility, and the experience of self-control. Dr. Garry Landreth, founder of the Center for Play Therapy, developed the A • C • T method to setting limits 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.

According to Dr. Landreth, "when limits should be set but they are not, children are deprived of the opportunity to learn something important about themselves."[†]

Effective Discipline With A•C•T Limit Setting

A • C • T

A = Acknowledge the Feeling

C = Communicate the Limit

T = Target the Choice

"Looks like you [feel, want, wish],
but [first object] is not for [action]-ing.
[Second object] is. You can. . ."



Examples of a Limit Setting Sequence

"Looks like you want to draw,
but the wall is not for drawing."

[point] "You can draw on the paper or
[point] you can draw on the chalk board."

"I can see you feel frustrated,
but the doll clothes are not for tearing."

[point] "You can tear the shoe box or
[point] you can tear egg carton."

"Jim, I know you feel like hitting me,
but I'm not for hitting!"

[point] "You can hit the stuffed bear, or
[point] you can hit the pillow."

Rational for Limit Setting

As a result of setting limits, children become responsible for themselves and their own behavior:

- Limit setting is for the growth of the child
- Limits are not punishment
- Limits promote healthy boundaries
- Limits help the child develop decision-making skills
- Limits help the child develop self-control
- Limits help the child develop personal responsibility
- Limits promote consistency
- Limits free the child, and with freedom comes responsibility
- Set limits that fit within your household rules, but allow more freedom for exploration and expression
- Determine your own limits ahead of time (e.g. toy damage, throwing toys, pouring water on the floor, hitting another person or pet, etc.)
- Be consistent
- Before setting a limit, ask yourself:
"Is this limit necessary?"
- Before allowing a behavior, ask yourself:
"Can I consistently allow this?"

**Responsibility accompanies decision-making.
Before children can resist their first impulses, they
must have an awareness of their behavior, a feeling of
responsibility and the experience of self-control.**

FIRST:

Acknowledge the child's feelings to diffuse the child's emotions.

- By acknowledging the child's feelings, you support the child's intent, even if you can't support the child's behavior.
- Reflect feelings, intentions, wants, and wishes FIRST, with phrases like:

"Looks like. . ."

"I know you'd really like to. . ."

"I can tell you're feeling. . ."

**When the child's message is
clearly understood
the child no longer needs to act out.**

SECOND:

Communicate the Limit Clearly

- Use no fault statements, but common sense statements instead.
- Use "BUT" to emphasize the limit.

THIRD:

Target Appropriate Choices

Understanding the child's intention helps in selecting alternatives.

- Direct action away from the original object by looking, pointing, and stating alternative choices.
- Avoid the use of "OK?"
- Be creative in offering alternatives
- After saying: [second object] is, " you can add phrases like:

"You can. . ."

"You can choose to. . . if you'd like."

"You can pretend. . ." etc.

**Point using eyes, hands or
your entire arm to help interrupt
the child's focus on the object.**

[†]Source: Landreth (2002). *Play Therapy: The Art of the Relationship*. Brunner-Routledge, NY:NY.