



Setting Limits for your Child

To help your children develop self-control, set routines for bedtime, meals, and chores. Routines help children feel safe, because they know parents' expectations. Young children have a hard time going from one activity to another. Warning them a few minutes ahead helps them get ready. Be clear about their choices. Remind children of the rules. Saying "no" is not good enough. Children need reminders.

Remember, children do as you do, not as you say. If you want your children to obey rules, to solve their own problems, to control their anger, and to live in peace with others, then you must live that way too.

1. **Start with only a few rules.** The more rules you have, the harder it will be for your children to remember them.
2. **Be sure you know why you are saying "no."** As a parent, you must keep your children healthy and safe. You must help your children learn to get along with other people. And you must stick to what you believe in. Explain your reasons for saying no. Be sure your child understands your reasons.
3. **Give kids a choice.** Kids need a voice in setting limits. They need a chance to tell you what they think and feel. Even a child of five or six can talk with you and help you set fair limits. When kids help you make the rules, they are more likely to obey them. It's important to understand their point of view, but just because you listen to them does not mean that you have to agree with them and change your rules. You can set limits together, though some may have to be set by you alone.
4. **Say what you mean.** Be very clear about your limits. For example, state clearly the hour you want your child to be home. Say "12 o'clock," instead of "not too late."
5. **Will my children like me when I set limits?** Will they think I'm a meanie? Setting limits does not make you a "meanie" forever – not if you are fair. When you stick to your limits, your children may not like what you are doing. They may be unhappy. Try not to get upset. It only makes things worse. Accept their feelings, but stick to your limits. For example, say, "it's hard to leave when you are having so much fun, but it's time to go." Fair limits show that you care. If you set limits that are unfair and too strict, your children will try to get back at you. If you do not set any limits, your children will push and push until *someone* sets a limit for them, maybe a school principal or a police officer.