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Parent Relationships

Maintaining The T.I.E.S. That Bind

Improve your parenting skills AND relationship

January 2008

Dear Fiona,

Let me be one of the first to welcome you to 2008. Hopefully the holidays gave you some time to relax, visit friends and family, and get ready for a great year ahead.

In order for all parents of young (and not so young) children to start off on the right foot, this month's newsletter gives sound advice on how to set - and hold - limits with young children. Of course the article won't be able to answer all your questions or deal with each unique situation you encounter, but it will give you a good template to follow when you want to stamp out behaviors that concern you.

Contact me with any questions you may have so that your limit-setting skills can become the envy of others!

Best regards,

Fiona

Four Simple Steps to Set Limits with Young Children

At some point during (perhaps even before) our parenting years, we may be advised to always "set limits with your children", or "be clear about your expectations", amid other similar pieces of advice. We may very sincerely want to heed that advice, but what does it all actually mean and how do we

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Setting Limits with Children

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go about doing it?

I'd like to first explain what I mean by setting limits and expectations, and what the difference is between the two. Limits refer to those behaviors we would like our children to no longer engage in (such as hitting a sibling), and expectations refer to those behaviors we'd like them to engage in more often (such as picking up toys).

In this article I will address the part about setting limits with a child in the 2-5 year age-range, and start by explaining why I think it is so important.

In my professional, and personal, opinion, I believe children need some structure in their lives - and being clear with them about what we as parents would like them to do, or *not* do, is one very effective way of providing such structure. It also clearly outlines their boundaries, allowing them total freedom to behave like children as long as they stay within them, when straying outside of them could be unsafe or anxiety-provoking.

Psychologically speaking, children need boundaries, just as they need physical boundaries. When we prevent a young child from running out of a play area into a parking lot by keeping the gate closed, we keep him physically safe from harm he might not be aware of, or able to cope with. Setting boundaries provides him with the very fundamental psychological and social structure within which he can have emotional freedom and safety.

So how do we set the limit?

Step 1: Decide which particular behavior you will no longer tolerate or accept. Make sure it is realistic, necessary and attainable for his age, and rehearse how you will tell him in very simple terms what he can no longer do and what will happen when he does.

Step 2: When your child is not engaging in the behavior but is in a receptive mood - when he's not hungry and tired! - tell him simply and clearly what your plan is: "Todd, your dad and I want you to stop hitting Taylor, and when you do, you will sit in your Timeout Chair for a short while". Keep your voice kind, neutral, and not in any way threatening. Ask him if he understands you, answer any clarifying questions - but don't

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(from parenting
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parenting teens)**

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get drawn into negotiations - then move on to another subject entirely. Don't revisit the subject until you have to act on what you told him.

Step 3: When Todd hits Taylor (as he surely will soon enough), use the same words you did when you set the limit and remind him he will now spend a few minutes in his Timeout Chair (or some other place where he is deprived briefly of your, and other's, attention. Ignore his pleas or other attempts to draw you in. Just continue with what you were doing when he transgressed. When he's been quiet in Timeout for about half a minute, tell him he can join the activities and make no mention of either the hitting or any disruptive behavior while he was in Timeout.

Step 4: When hitting is no longer a problem, use the same approach for any other behaviors that might be causing concern.

Be prepared for your child to test his limits, and when he does, simply repeat steps 2 and 3 above. Be consistent and compassionate, and he'll come around to your way of thinking.

Now sit back, congratulate yourself on your success, and enjoy your child!

About Fiona

*Fiona Cattermole, MSW, CPBA, is a Relationship and Parenting Coach. Her mission is to help parents strengthen their relationship with each other **at the same time as** raising happy and well-adjusted kids.*

Contact her at 303.807.1044, fionacattermole@finexex.com if you would like engage her for a presentation, attend a seminar, or talk to her about parent relationship or children's behavioral coaching.

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