

Setting Healthy Limits

According to Dr. Garry Landreth, founder of the Center for Play Therapy at the University of North Texas, setting limits helps children learn self-control, responsibility, and the knowledge that they have choices. Dr. Landreth created the A.C.T. method of setting limits.

A = Acknowledge your child's Feeling

By acknowledging the child's feeling, you support your child's emotion even if you cannot support your child's behavior. Reflecting feelings and intentions helps children learn feeling vocabulary and feel supported.

Examples of acknowledging feeling starters:

"Looks like you..."

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

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

C = Communicate the Limit

It is important to use statements that make sense and do not emphasize blame or fault.

Examples of setting the Limit:

"Your brother is not for hitting"

"It's time for bed"

"The wall is not for writing on"

T = Target the Choice

Once you have identified your child's feeling or intent, you will be able to identify a healthy alternative. Direct your child's attention away from the original object by looking, pointing, and stating new alternatives. Be creative in offering choices that you are comfortable with and proceed.

Example of targeting choices:

"You can put yourself to bed or you can choose for me to read a book to you before bed. Which do you choose?"

Limit setting helps your child develop personal responsibility, decision making skill, healthy boundaries, and self-control.