

- 1) **Introduction**
- 2) **Overview:** We will talk about strategies but also review other variables that need to be considered
- 3) **Activity:** Acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. Acceptable and unacceptable behaviors are different from parent to parent, but also depending on how the parent feels in that moment (i.e. if a parent is tired may be less tolerant of behaviors). In the same way, depending on the moment they are in, children may be more willing/able to follow directions and display some behaviors.
- 4) **How many rules/limits? 2/3 max.** Pick your battles!
- 5) **These 2/3 rules** should be shared with other caregivers
- 6) **Strategy 1:** Set limits in a CLEAR way. “No hitting” is clearer than “Be kind”
- 7) **Strategy 2:** Praise whenever a rule is NOT broken. Don’t wait for your child to do something special to praise him, any time he/she is behaving fine or not doing anything particular (but not breaking the rule) is a good time to praise.
- 8) **Strategy 3:** If a rule is broken, quickly give a consequence and then go back to expect that your child will be well behaved (expect success). You correct the behavior not the child. Keep a success oriented attitude (your child can behave well)
- 9) **What could a consequence be?** Consequences do not need to be harsh, but they need to be timely and consistent. Small, timely and consistent consequences are more powerful than harsh consequences distant in time from your child’s mistake.
- 10) **Strategy 4:** Make request/set limits in an assertive way: no questions. Use statements such as “I need you to...”

11) **Strategy 5:** Make sure your child is paying attention. Be present to enforce the rule. Look at your child in his/her eyes, make sure your child is not distracted, state your request and be there to make sure they follow through. Praise (if child complies) or give a consequence.

Important considerations related to setting limits:

- **“There are no rules without relationship” (S. Finn).** Use special time or labeled praise to improve the quality of the relationship with your child. Special time could be setting aside 10/15 minutes per day when your child has your complete attention and he is in the lead, deciding what and how to play. You can also use labeled praise or acknowledgements (i.e. I see that you are using black and blue blocks to build a tower! I see from your face that you are surprised seeing your cousin. Wow, you are really focused on coloring this drawing and put a lot of color in it!). These are ways to make your child feel that he/she has your attention not only when he/she misbehaves and that you accept and love him/her unconditionally.

- **Even the best strategies don't always work.** Consider a success if they work 70%, 80% of the times.

- **When a child is not respecting a rule, he/she is not doing something against you.** Children are learning self-regulation and they are not always able to control their impulses. This is a process (adults at times struggle with self-regulation too). Pushing limits is one of the ways children grow and learn the effects of their behaviors on others. Also, rules are reassuring as they make the environment predictable for children, but children need to test them to check that rules still apply.

- **Tantrums are different from meltdown.** In a tantrum a child is pushing a limit, and after recovering the child can resume functioning well. In a meltdown, the child is completely overwhelmed and needs support to recharge physically and emotionally (for example a child who is overtired because he/she skipped nap can have a meltdown). Caregivers need to distinguish between tantrums and meltdowns so that they can support their children more effectively in these moments

- **Consider when most problems with limits happen** (i.e. at the of the day, transitions btw environments) and try to prevent them

- **If you give in one day/one time forgive yourself and try again the day after.** Consistency is important but we are not machines. There are rules and exceptions and children understand that. You need to be consistent but also realistic.

- **Self-care.** Just like a phone cannot work if not charged, you need to have some time to re-charge yourself as an individual and as a couple. Sometimes caregivers see self-care as an afterthought, something that they will engage in if they have time. But the truth is, if we don't self-care, if we feel tense, overwhelmed and stressed, we cannot model being calm for our children and we may over-react when they break limits, leading to escalations.

- **Talk w other parents.** You are not alone with these problems

- **When should you seek therapy?** There is no clear-cut rule for deciding when therapy is needed. Although problems with respecting limits are common in children, you may feel that for your child it is particularly hard to follow directions and that you don't know how to best help him/her. You may also feel that you are overwhelmed and unable to support your child's self-regulation. In these cases, individual therapy for you and/or your child or family therapy may be helpful. Seeking therapy is a sign of caring for one own mental health and does not indicate that there is something inherently wrong with you or your child.

Resources:

- "Transforming the Difficult Child, the Nurtured Heart Approach" by Glasser
- www.serenamessina.com
- <https://www.facebook.com/drserenamessina/>

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