

SETTING LIMITS WITH LOVE

Young children depend on their parents and caregivers to provide them with a stable and loving environment so they can learn and grow. An important way that parents and caregivers can help their young children feel safe and secure is by participating in activities with them like talking, reading and singing every day. These nurturing activities build young children’s brains, and help parents and caregivers feel more connected to their children, too.

Although it may sound strange, setting limits is another important way to establish a loving environment for young children. Setting limits is a way of letting your child know that you care for them and want to protect them. When parents and caregivers set limits, they encourage their children’s healthy social-emotional development by teaching them the skills they need to



Setting limits is a way to establish a loving environment.

resolve conflict, treat others with care, and manage their emotions. These early social-emotional skills help children do better in school, build positive relationships with others, and stay safe and healthy as they grow up.

So how can parents and caregivers set limits for young babies and toddlers?

THE FIRST STEP: ESTABLISH COMFORTING ROUTINES

Routines help babies and young toddlers know what to expect every day so that they can focus on learning and growing. During the first few weeks of life, it’s best to follow your baby’s lead. But as your baby adjusts to the world outside the womb, you can gradually establish a regular schedule for your baby’s sleep, play and meal times every day. And because every child is different, pay attention to your baby’s patterns and then try to stick to the schedule that works for them.

DAIly REMINDER: TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

The more responsive a parent or caregiver is to a baby’s needs, the more secure that baby feels. But all parents and caregivers feel stressed out by a child’s cries or tantrums sometimes. If you begin to feel anxious or angry, place your child in a safe place like their crib, and give yourself a break. A short walk around the house, a few deep breaths, and even trading places with another parent or caregiver can give you the time you need to calm down and recharge. Take care of you, too!

“DO AS I DO”: MODELING POSITIVE BEHAVIOR

Young children learn by watching the parents and caregivers in their lives. The best way to show a young child how you want them to behave is to praise good behavior, and to act out positive ways to solve problems, take turns, and cooperate. As your toddler gets older, talk together about appropriate and inappropriate ways to respond to things they don't like.

LEARNING ABOUT YOUR CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT

Here are some basic age-appropriate ways that you can set limits for your child:

BIRTH TO 9 MONTHS OLD

- Consistency is important. When parents respond consistently to their babies' cries for loving attention or care, babies learn about the consequences of their actions and that when they need help, they'll get it. Respond consistently to your baby's cries, and make sure other caregivers are just as responsive.
- Spend quality time with your baby. Talking, reading and singing with your baby every day helps build a trusting relationship with you, and promotes healthy brain growth.
- Follow their lead. By watching your baby closely, you will learn what they are trying to tell you, and how to make them feel happy and secure.

9 MONTHS TO 18 MONTHS OLD

- Set consistent limits. Help your baby enter toddlerhood by encouraging their natural curiosity and providing safe objects and places they can explore. Routine is important for older babies, too, so provide consistent meal times and bed times.
- Encourage independence. Older babies are interested in feeding themselves, and in crawling or walking around their environments. Be ready for them to make a mess with their food—these messes help them learn! Give them small bits of food they can play with and that clean up easily.



TALKING, READING AND SINGING
WITH YOUR BABY EVERY DAY HELPS
BUILD A TRUSTING RELATIONSHIP.



Want to learn more about how to set firm but loving limits? Check out our video “Abuelita: Grandma Sets Limits With Love” and find more tips at talkingisteaching.org/big-feelings

18 MONTHS TO 24 MONTHS

- Pick your battles. Toddlers at this age may want to do more things on their own, but may still need your help for some activities. Encourage them to try more things on their own, and reserve a firm but calm “no” for things that may be harmful.
- Let them make safe choices. As toddlers learn how to communicate, they may be more interested in picking out their own clothes or food. Offer them “either/or” choices, so they feel more in control.
- Tantrums are typical! Routines can help you avoid tantrums, but not all of them. Use diversion and play to distract toddlers from tantrums, or remove them quickly and calmly from the situation until they can calm down. If possible, stay with your child during a tantrum and stay away from punishment—young toddlers learn how to manage their emotions better if you use the time after a tantrum to talk briefly about what happened and how to calm down in the future.

24 MONTHS TO 36 MONTHS

- Encourage words to express feelings. Older toddlers are beginning to use more words, so you can take this opportunity to help your child find the words to express what they’re feeling and thinking.
- Explain consequences. As your child gets older, you can help them think about the consequences of their actions so they can make better choices.
- Keep meal times stress-free. Toddlers can be picky, and this can cause a lot of stress at meal times. Set simple rules about appropriate ways to act during meals, but let your child choose how much to eat.

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