

WellNest Counseling

Bringing wellness to your nest



Week 10: Setting Limits Intentionally

Rule of thumb: Once a limit is a limit, it is always a limit.

Please complete this workbook before your live meeting

We've spent the last couple of weeks learning about how to have intentional and peaceful conversations. Well, as a parent, I am also a realist. I recognize that there will be times when you don't have the time to have a full-blown conversation with your child. For example, stopping traffic in the middle of the road to explain to your child in a peaceful and sometimes painstakingly long way is not exactly appropriate or safe. Or sometimes we are going to be late to a very important date (sorry, I had to) and we just need compliance, not negotiations.

The good news is that there is a way to meet your child's emotional needs and stick to your schedule (or maintain safety) without yelling. This week is going to be all about what to do when you need quick compliance but don't want to resort to yelling.

As parents, we have to set limits, say no, and be consistent, *all while respecting feelings and making our kids feel seen*. That is not an easy task. It's not easy to say no to a person and be empathetic... but it is possible. When we need to set and enforce a limit there is one go-to skill we are going to start with. Now, I want to be clear, this does not avoid the tantrum. If you need to say no to your kids, they are likely going to be upset. What this does do is help you, the parent, set a boundary and enforce it empathetically and without anger. So here we go:

FLO (Feelings, Limits, Options)

When we set limits in a predictable, consistent, and empathetic way, we allow our children to learn in a safe way. We send the message, "I care about your opinion". When kids feel heard and understood they are more likely to cooperate. We do this by using FLO. Keep in mind that once a limit is set, it is a limit forever. This helps keep things consistent.

F- Feelings: start by reflecting your child's feelings. Are you catching a theme yet- we always start by reflecting feelings! This is because it is a really clear and effective way for your kids to feel seen and understood. And when we feel seen and understood as humans, we are more likely to cooperate, even if it's not what we want.

L- Limits: describe what the limit is. This might be in the form of a negative like, "The couch is not for jumping on" or a positive like, "Dessert is for eating after dinner." When we set a limit, we do not use *you*. The reason for this is that we want the limits to be universal, not specific to the individual. For example, "The couch is not for jumping on" implies that is not the use of couches. No one in the world is supposed to jump on couches.

O- Options: so, we've told them the limit and now they need to know what they *can* do. What are acceptable options? How can we get to the goal? How can we work together?



Let's see an example:

Scenario 1

It's almost time for dinner, and you have asked Tim and John to pick up their toys before dinner. After 5 minutes you come back in and see that it has not been done yet.

1. *Feelings.* (Be sure your voice conveys empathy and understanding): "Tim and John, you are having so much fun playing. It is hard to stop."
2. *Limits.* (Use 10 words or less): "The toys need to be picked up before dinner."
3. *Options.* (The goal here is to provide your child with an acceptable way to express their emotions and let your child practice self-regulation) - "You can set a timer and race to see who can pick up the toys fastest or you can race to see who can pick up the most."

Scenario 2

Joseph is knocking toys off the shelf because his little brother accidentally knocked over the Lego ship model he had been working on all week.

1. F - "Joseph, you're feeling very mad because your model has fallen apart!"
2. L - "Toys are not breaking."
3. O - "You can choose to hit the pillow or break the egg cartons."

When to set limits:

- A. Limits are not needed until they are needed.
- B. When there is a risk of injury.
- C. When there is a risk of property damage.
- D. To maintain parental acceptance and understanding of the child.
- E. To provide consistency of expectations for the child.

Before setting a limit - ask yourself:

1. "Is this limit necessary? Is this a battle I want to fight?"
 2. "Can I continue to set this limit consistently?"
 3. "If I don't set a limit on this behavior, can I continue to let this behavior happen?"
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CONSISTENT LIMITS *lead to* a PREDICTABLE, SAFE ENVIRONMENT *leads to* a SENSE OF SECURITY



This week, try to practice using this skill. It is a bit like learning a new language. You'll likely find yourself fumbling for the right words in the middle of a situation. In preparation, use the questions below to create a response in the FLO format about a situation you could potentially see happening this week.

Scenario:

Feelings:

Limit:

Options:

Sometimes...

...FLO doesn't do the trick. In this event, you would move to choice-giving as a consequence. This method allows for the child to learn autonomy and self-control while also allowing you to be clear and concise with your boundaries.

Setting Boundaries Gently and Firmly

Dan Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson stress the importance of soothing your child, offering kindness and compassion, *and* holding firm boundaries with high expectations. Gary Landreth, professor at the University of North Texas and creator of The Child-Parent Relationship Training Manual offers a sound way to set boundaries firmly, consistently, and with kindness. Notice the number of times the phrase, "you choose" is used.

Take the following example from above:

Scene: It's almost time for dinner and you have asked Tim and John to pick up their toys before dinner. After 5 minutes you come back in and see that it has not been done yet and you have already used FLO (up to 3 times).

Parent: "John and Tim, it's almost time for dinner and I have already asked you to pick up your toys once. When you choose to pick up your toys before dinner, you choose to get to watch 30 minutes of TV after dinner. When you choose not to pick up your toys before dinner, you choose not to get to watch 30 minutes of TV after dinner."



At this point, you walk away. When dinner is ready, you go back into the room and see one of two things:

- John and Tim have picked up their toys: “Boys, I see you have chosen to pick up your toys, so you have chosen to watch 30 minutes of TV after dinner!”
- John and Tim have not picked up their toys: “Boys, I see you have not picked up your toys and it is now dinner time. You have chosen not to watch 30 minutes of TV.
- John and Tim have not picked up their toys, you explain that they have not picked up their toys, so they do not get to watch tv. They start frantically picking up their toys, “Boys, I see you are picking up your toys now, but it is already dinnertime. The moment you chose not to pick up your toys, was the very moment you chose not to watch tv. I am sorry, you still will not be able to get to watch TV.”

Choice-giving tips:

- Be consistent and have *empathy*!! This does not work if you are not consistent and empathetic. You lack authority and sincerity without either.
- The consequences ideally only last till the end of the day. Each day is a new start!

You try:

Think of a scenario where you had to enforce a consequence. Use the fill in the blank to use choice giving. Remember choice giving as a consequence can stand alone or be used after FLO.

- Scene:

- When you choose _____ you choose not to _____ . When you choose _____ , you choose _____ .

Putting it all together:

FLO and Choice-giving can be used individually or to build off each other. Here is how the whole process would sound:

Scenario:

It’s almost dinner time and you have asked Tim and John to pick up their toys before dinner. After 5 minutes you come back in and see that it has not been done yet. So, you use FLO:

- Feelings.** (Be sure your voice conveys empathy and understanding): “Tim and John, you are having so much fun playing. It is hard to stop.”



2. *Limits. (Use 10 words or less):* "The toys need to be picked up before dinner."
3. *Options. (The goal here is to provide your child with an acceptable way to express their emotions and let your child practice self-regulation) -* "You can set a timer and race to see who can pick up the toys fastest or you can race to see who can pick up the most."

You walk away and come back later, seeing the boys still have not picked up their toys. You can choose to repeat FLO up to 3 times. Sometimes, kids' brains need repetition of 3 times before it will sink in. Your next step is going to be to use choice-giving as a consequence.

Parent says: "John and Tim, it's almost time for dinner and I have already asked you to pick up your toys once. When you choose to pick up your toys before dinner, you choose to get to watch 30 minutes of TV after dinner. When you choose not to pick up your toys before dinner, you choose not to get to watch 30 minutes of TV after dinner."

At this point, you walk away. When dinner is ready, you go back into the room and see one of two things:

- a. John and Tim have picked up their toys: "Boys, I see you have chosen to pick up your toys, so you have chosen to watch 30 minutes of TV after dinner!"
- b. John and Tim have not picked up their toys: "Boys, I see you have not picked up your toys and it is now dinner time. You have chosen not to watch 30 minutes of TV."
- c. John and Tim have not picked up their toys, you explain they have picked up their toys, so they do not get to watch tv. They start frantically picking up their toys, "Boys, I see you are picking up your toys now, but it is already dinner time. The moment you chose not to pick up your toys, was the very moment you chose not to watch tv. I am sorry, you still will not be able to get to watch TV."

Reflect:

Use the rest of the space provided to reflect on this week's content and write down any questions that you have now or come up during this week:

*If safety is in question don't spend time walking through these steps. Do what you feel is right to keep your child safe. For example, if your child is running into oncoming traffic, pick them up. Even if they are screaming and feeling unseen or misunderstood. Remember: "It may not be what you did, but what you do after what you did that may be most important."



References:

Siegel, D. J. (2017). *Brainstorm: The power and purpose of the teenage brain*. Langara College.

Landreth, G. (2006). *Child Parent Relationship Therapy Manual*. New York, Routledge.

Siegel, D. J., & Bryson, T. P. (2020). *The Power of Showing Up: How Parental Presence Shapes Who Our Kids Become and how Their Brains Get Wired*. Scribe Publications.

Schuler, K. (2011). *Jai Institute For Parenting Workbook*.

