

## **NO.... DON'T.... STOP.... BE CAREFUL.**

This constant repetition leads to mounting frustration and an unnecessary power struggle with your child. Our children need us to set limits so that they can feel safe. Testing those limits is an important developmental step toward gaining confidence in themselves and their world.

This power struggle is rarely about the desired object or activity, but often a struggle for control. Your child has a growing need to feel independent and in control of their world. This sense of control assists them to build their self-esteem. So how can we balance setting the limit while helping our children mature into healthy, respectful and law-abiding citizens. I suggest using the “A-C-T Limit Setting” technique developed by Dr. Garry Landreth (renowned Play Therapist).

### **Acknowledge the Feeling Communicate the Limit Target the Alternative**

So, if little Sarah is demanding candy at the store, you could say:

“You are hungry (the feeling), but we are not buying any candy today (the limit), You *CAN* have an apple or a pear (the alternative).”

Or little Tommy is jumping on the sofa:

“You have a lot of energy (the feeling), but we do not jump on the sofa (the limit), You *CAN* jump on the mat or this pillow (the alternative).”

## **WIN-WIN**

Already you can see that the child is being given the opportunity to control the outcome. They have the choice to continue with the behavior or choose your alternative. So why would they choose the alternative?

This is when it is important to do the 3 steps in order. Acknowledging your child’s feeling softens the blow of the limit. They will feel heard and understood. This provides security and protects their self-esteem as it validates that what they are feeling is right.

Remember that limits help a child feel safe. Limits should be set with a calm and firm tone. “We do not jump on the couch” should be simply stated like “One plus One equals Two”. It is a fact in your home. This limit should be consistent so that your child knows that every time they do the behavior there will be no exceptions. An exception this time on the rule can mean future limits may be flexible.

And finally, feeling the security of being heard and the safety of the limit, children can choose the behavior that they will most likely be rewarded for... your alternatives!

### **Limit setting does not need to be a battle every time**

There will be times when you need to quickly set the limit. If little Marcus is about to run out into traffic you don't have time to acknowledge his feelings. Reducing the amount of times you start with the limit will foster a sense of cooperation in your relationship with your child.

### **Help! My child is still not listening.**

If this is a new approach in your home, then you and your child may take some time getting used to it. You might need to think up alternatives beforehand as they can be difficult to come up with on the spot. Practice the technique during less demanding situations until you feel comfortable. When setting the limits:

- Check you have your child's attention. You may need to say their name, get in their line of sight or even touch them gently.
- Repeat your ACT. Check in with your body. Are you conveying the message calmly? If you are frustrated, then you might need to take a moment.

Please contact me if you have any queries with implementing the A-C-T method.

This A-C-T method is something I often suggest during my therapy sessions with parents and families. If you would like to talk about how I can help, or what therapy sessions look like, reach out to me for a no obligation call to briefly discuss your situation and how we can potentially work together.