



Creating safety: setting limits with children

An important part of parenting is to ensure safety in the family by setting limits. Setting firm but kind limits helps children to feel that they are cared for and helps them manage their feelings and behaviours.

KEEP ROUTINES SIMPLE

Creating a simple daily routine for the family can help keep the household calm and predictable. Ground rules that are discussed and set by the family that focus on 'what to do' for example, 'we all sit at the table to eat dinner', 'we say thank you and show kindness to each other', 'we put toys away and brush teeth before bed'. If everyone understands the expected behaviours then the family can all work towards them. When caregivers follow these routines then consistency and predictability is increased for the child.

THINGS TO DO OFTEN

- Model desirable behaviours to children since children watch and learn from their parents.
- Balance the positive and negative attention given to children. Children crave connection with their caregivers, and behave in ways to seek positive or negative attention. Give more positive attention (praise, affection, rewards) where possible as this helps to encourage positive behaviours.
- Keep eye contact with children to get their attention and to ensure they are listening when you have something important to say.
- Try to use a firm but respectful tone when giving instructions and setting limits.
- Let children know that while their behaviour may not be appropriate, they are still loved.
- Commenting on appropriate behaviour tells the child that they are loved, and their effort to do the right thing is appreciated.

Children often communicate their feelings through behaviour, and stressful family periods can influence this. Remember that it is normal for children to push limits or overstep boundaries to get their carer's attention. It is more effective to comment and encourage desirable behaviour than punish inappropriate behaviour.

Seeking help and talking to a health professional (doctor, psychologist, nurse or social worker) about family difficulties and behavioural issues that may be impacting on the family can help identify solutions and additional support in times of need.



Project Air Strategy acknowledges the major support of NSW Health and MH-Children and Young People, Mental Health Drug and Alcohol Office, NSW Ministry of Health. The Project works with mental health clinicians, consumers and carers to deliver effective treatments, implements research strategies supporting scientific discoveries, and offers high quality training and education. Contact us at info-projectair@uow.edu.au or visit www.projectairstrategy.org