

Parenting Your Child Effectively: Give Safe, Understandable Limits

Marilyn S. Fox, Extension Educator

This guide will help parents give safe, understandable limits to their children. This is a part of a series of 10 “Parenting Your Child Effectively” guides.

Sometimes we need something right now to help us calm an emotional discussion with our children. When things are difficult, we are most likely to “lose our cool” and say or do things that we wish later we hadn’t. We need something that settles the conflict without either the child or the parent feeling put down. There are a number of guidance principles that help us discipline in stressful times.

Guidance Principle

Give children safe limits they can understand. When children misbehave, let them know you understand their feelings without accepting what they are doing. Be in charge calmly and consistently. Children see the world differently than adults. Rules and safety warnings that may be easy for adults to understand need to be explained clearly and simply to children. Be sure they know what you expect them to do. It’s not fair to blame them for breaking rules they did not understand.

Behavior	Rule/Safe Limit
Jeff, 3, is happily pouring milk onto his dinner plate.	“Jeff, milk stays in your cup or in the pitcher. When your cup is empty, you may pour some more. But you may not pour it over your dinner.”
Tran, 2, has pushed a chair close to the range to see what’s bubbling in all those pans.	“No! You must never do that! You might get burned if you are so close to the stove.”
Jenny, 4, has a screaming fit because you will not let her go out to play (she has been sick and the weather is damp and cold).	
Miguel, 5, crossed the street without telling you.	
Sally will not go to bed and throws a fit every night.	

Acknowledgment

This fact sheet contains guidelines to help parents interact with their children. It was reformatted from NebGuide G991 (Revised May 1997) written by Herbert G. Lingren, Extension Family Life Specialist.

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**Index: Family Life
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