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how to set limits in five words or less

English

from the hand in hand blog

Even when we bring our best selves, by not shouting, bribing or threatening children when we try and tell them no, setting limits, and having them listened to, still often feels like an uphill struggle.

But there's a simple way to reach children who are acting off-track.

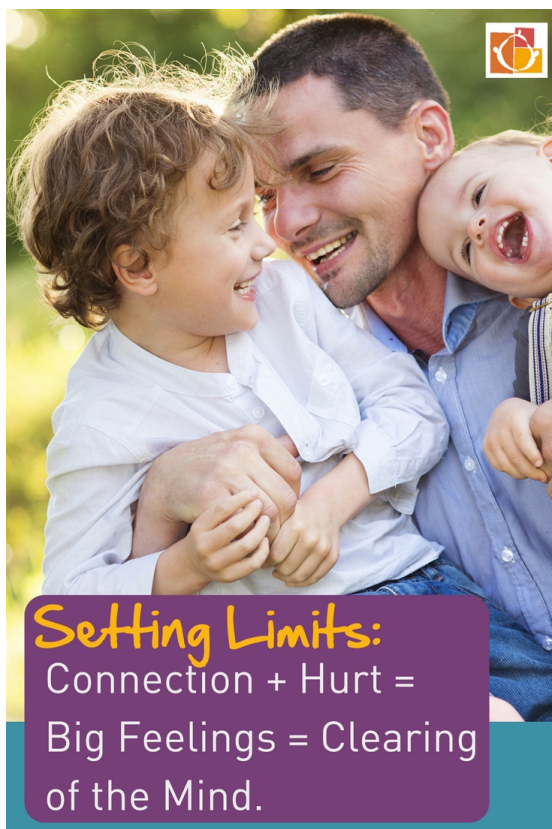
Use touch over words.

When children are acting irrationally, they are trapped, says Hand in Hand Parenting's Patty Wipfler. "They don't want to be scared, or wild, or hurting people," she says. "But they have no idea how to get out of it themselves. They need your help."

"Your limit is like a gift that sets them free," she says. "A rescue squad."

When a child is caught in his feelings, his pre-frontal cortex shuts down. He becomes immune to reasoning and logic, and so words go unheard.

However, even with the pre-frontal cortex in shut-down, a child's social and emotional centre does keep



Setting Limits:
Connection + Hurt =
Big Feelings = Clearing
of the Mind.

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Why is this important?

Because it proves that kids are more responsive to touch than to words.

set the limit

To **bring the limit**, it is essential to stop the action. Use your body to get between your child and whatever he is doing. Unless a child is hurting another, there's no need to move in fast.

Use as few words as possible. Under five words works best, says Patty.

"If a child is disturbing the dog, gently put your hand on his," she says. Make eye contact and softly, but firmly, say "No."

That one word, coupled with your touch, your eyes and your warm engagement, should halt the behavior.

And then wait.

As a child's natural instinct to heal takes hold, you will see them deal with new feelings.

You may see:

- Struggling and screaming
- Tantrums
- Tears
- Aggression

No words are needed as these feelings erupt. This release is your child washing away his bad feelings. Stay close, offer an occasional word of comfort or gentle touch until he comes to you. If he is kicking, keep him, and yourself, safe. "You may have to parry, bob up and down," Patty says.

Don't feel like you have to solve the situation or stop the tears. There is no need to bribe, lecture or reason. Children will feel a parents' closeness and empathy while he works on his feelings.

If you need a formula to hold onto the next time you set a limit, it would be this:

Connection + Hurt (shown in a child's irrational behavior) = big feelings = clearing of the mind.

Try this 2-Step Plan for Setting Limits the next time your child is acting out.

- **Move in with your body, halt the action**

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After a child has cleared away all the noise you will see much better. You will see a child that wants to be with you. A child that wants to co-operate," Patty says.

what to say when setting limits

If you need some ideas for short, gentle, guiding sentences, try these:

"I can't let you do that."

"Oh, honey no."

"Come back."

"It's time."

"That's your brother's"

"No, you can't have another."

"No."

To hear how softly Patty uses these [watch this clip](#)

from the hand in hand toolbox:

For more on Setting Limits get this [article and checklist](#)

Learn why crying is good for your child read [What to Say During Staylistening](#)

Learn about Setting Limits in a way that connects and fosters growth with your child with our [Setting Limits & Building Co-Operation](#) online class. It's free with [Hand in Hand's Parent Club](#). Go here for details on how to join here with a 30-day money back guarantee.

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what do tantrums, tears and laughter have in common?
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Our mission is to provide parents with insights, skills, and support they need to listen to and **connect with their children** in a way that allows each child to thrive. We do this through easy-to-access **support**, **classes**, and **literature**. We offer vital information to help parents deal with issues from **children biting** and **kids' temper tantrums** to **learning issues** and **bullying on playgrounds and in schools**.

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