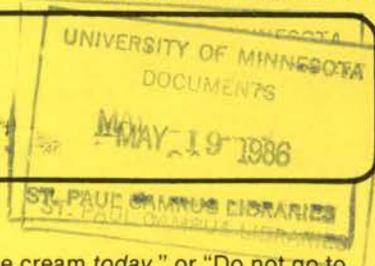


young families

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Setting Limits (cont.)

In the last issue of *Young Families*, two suggestions on setting limits for children were offered: (1) limit your limits to times when they're really important, and (2) set reasonable limits, according to your child's age and abilities. Three more suggestions are offered here.

Be Clear and Positive

State your limits clearly and simply. A clear limit tells a child exactly what is expected and when. If you tell your grade-schooler, "Every night, right after supper, you are to take the garbage, put it in the trash can outside, and make sure the lid is closed," your child knows exactly what to do. In contrast, saying "Clean up everything after supper" is vague. Your child may not know exactly what is expected. Don't blame your child for failing to follow instructions if the instructions were not clear in the first place.

Limits will also be more effective if they emphasize the positive—if they tell a child *what* to do rather than only *what not* to do. Instead of just saying, "Don't go in the street," if you say, "Play in the yard, not in the street," your child will have a better understanding of the opportunities as well as the limits.

When children become angry and act destructively, parents are likely to think first of negative limits: "Don't talk to me like that!" "Don't hit your brother!" "Don't throw things!" But children also need positive limits to help them deal with their emotions. Besides the "don'ts," a parent might also say, "When you get angry, tell me how you feel—say you're angry!" This shows a child an alternative way of handling anger.

Be Consistent

Limits must be consistently applied and enforced. Children are more likely to respect limits when they realize their parents mean what they say. If you expect your children to wash their hands before meals, you must maintain this limit every day. If you tell your children not to play in a neighbor's yard, it must be clear that this limit applies every time they are outside. However, limits can, and should, be revised if circumstances change.

Consistent limits are dependable. They provide security and direction for children. If a child is told one day not to play with sharp scissors, then the next day is permitted to do so, and the next day is punished for doing so, then the child will never know what is really expected. A child's respect for parents and for authority in general is likely to diminish if parents are indecisive and inconsistent in setting and enforcing limits.

Once a limit is set, the child should know clearly when it applies—one time, some of the time, or all of the time. We might tell our children, "Never play in the street," or "We don't

have enough money, so no ice cream today," or "Do not go to Billy's house around dinner time; they are busy then."

Let Children Help Set Limits

The ultimate goal in setting limits is to help children develop self-control and self-direction. You can show confidence in your children's abilities by talking with them about problems and by encouraging them to suggest guidelines for their own behavior. As an example, a mother and her 7-year-old son first discussed and then decided together on his bedtime routine: he would go to bed at 8 p.m. on school nights and would be allowed to read for 30 minutes before turning off the lights. A decision such as this meets both the child's desire for a transition time before going to sleep and the parent's concern for a reasonable time limit.

By involving your children in decision-making, you are more likely to gain their cooperation in maintaining the limit. Letting children help set their own limits also provides them with experience and practice in decision-making.

To summarize: examine the limits you set. Are they truly important? Are they reasonable? Are they clear enough for your child to understand? Do they tell your child what to do as well as what not to do? Do you apply and enforce them consistently? Do you encourage your children to set their own limits?

Ronald L. Pitzer
Extension Family Life Specialist

(Adapted in part from "Effective Discipline," Charles A. Smith, Kansas State University Cooperative Extension Service Publication C-621.)



When Kids Cook

Children like to cook. But, before allowing a child to handle food and kitchen tools, make sure the child is capable of doing the activity safely.

Food preparation tasks have different degrees of difficulty. The simplest tasks are tearing lettuce leaves, snapping beans, scrubbing potatoes, or dipping food, such as fish, in bread crumbs or rolling it in nuts. These are suitable activities for younger children.

Pouring liquids or spreading butter with a knife require more coordination. Rolling cookie dough into balls or peeling a hard-cooked egg or banana are increasing complex tasks.

Children should be old enough to understand safe work habits as they learn how to use sharp knives or handle hot liquids, dishes, or pans. Slicing fruit, peeling carrots, or grating cheese need supervision.

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Father's Role

Until recently, mothers were seen as the principal caregivers and teachers of attitudes and values in the family, while fathers were expected to be primarily breadwinners and disciplinarians. The attachment between mother and infant was considered so strong, important, and unique that fathers were widely viewed as unessential in the early years of their children's lives. But that viewpoint is changing. More and more fathers are becoming actively involved in parenting—in the care and supervision of their children.

Although mothers still provide most of the daily child care, many of today's fathers are becoming involved with parenting right from the beginning. They attend prenatal classes with their wives and are often present at the birth. They develop an attachment with the baby early in life. The child feels close to both parents. Recent research has shown that fathers who play an active role in nurturing and caring for their child have a powerful influence on all aspects of their child's development.

Benefits of Shared Parenting

A father's active role in parenting is of value not only to the parent-child relationship but to the marriage relationship as well. The benefits of shared parenting include:

- *Help and support.* A comforting aspect of shared parenting is the mutual help and support available to each partner. Parents can often work out child-rearing difficulties by talking over the children's needs and abilities and sharing the responsibility of guiding and teaching children.
- *A "sounding board."* Often mothers are expected to be experts in dealing with all kinds of child behavior. But emotional involvement with one's own children, coupled with high expectations for them, makes it difficult to maintain objectivity. When parents talk over child-rearing together, their different points of view can help put a problem into proper perspective.
- *Understanding.* By sharing child-rearing responsibilities, fathers become better acquainted with their children and more knowledgeable about their development.
- *Time off.* Shared parenting provides each parent a chance to relax alone away from children. Most parents can do a better job taking care of their children if they have some time free of the responsibility.
- *Positive example.* Children learn the meaning of marriage and family life chiefly through observing their own parents. Parents who have a happy and effective partnership provide a very positive example. Children also develop their ideas about the roles of men and women in our society by seeing how their own parents behave.
- *Enrichment.* Boys and girls need companionship with both parents and can gain much from fathers who spend time with them during their growing years. Fathers who actively participate in their children's upbringing are helping to develop strong satisfying parent-child relationships.

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Snack Ideas

Here is a list of easy-to-make snacks that can contribute to the nutritional well-being of children. Keep it on or near your refrigerator door.

Fruits

Unsweetened fruit juices
Apple, pear, melon, or plum wedges
Banana logs
Grapefruit, tangerine, or orange sections
Fresh or water-pack pineapple pieces
Grapes, raisins, strawberries
Pitted prunes or plums

Vegetables

Carrot, cucumber, or zucchini "coins"
Raw potato—sweet or white—cut in cubes or triangles
Green pepper rings
Raw broccoli flowers, cauliflower, green peas
Celery ribs—one inch pieces

Bread and Cereal

Ready-to-eat cereal or crackers, low in sugar, fat, or salt.
Whole grain or enriched white breads or plain muffins
Oatmeal, molasses, or peanut butter cookies
Plain popcorn*

Milk and Cheese

Milk — whole, lowfat, skim, or buttermilk
Plain yogurt
Cheese cubes, sticks, slices, curds, or small balls
Cottage cheese

Other Protein Foods

Nuts, peanuts*
Pumpkin, squash, or sunflower seeds*
Sliced or cubed lean meat
Hard-cooked eggs—sliced or in wedges
Peanut butter

*Do not give to very young children because of danger of choking.

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This Issue

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