

LIMIT SETTING & IMPROVING PARENT-CHILD COMMUNICATION

We've all been there: what you consider a simple request of your child results in them kicking and screaming, and you shaking your head in frustration. Breathe, regroup, and try these simple steps for improving the lines of communication between you and your kids.

Do you find yourself in needless battles with your children, and wish you could just make them stop? If you ever feel that you and your child are on competing wavelengths, or if you have ever heard your tween or teen mutter, “you just don’t get it,” you are far from alone. Negative or undesirable behavior in children is often a cause of their inability to communicate anger, frustration, or sadness through words.

Oftentimes, parents do not realize their mistakes in establishing limits — or the lack thereof — for their children until it is what they believe to be “too late.” And instead of blaming themselves, they blame their children for any undesirable behavior and communication issues. Many parents believe that if they are presenting their children with choices they are establishing limits, but this is only one part of the equation. It is imperative that parents clearly communicate what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior in a consistent manner.

The ACT model by renowned expert Garry Landreth, outlined below, is beneficial and effective for several reasons. These steps can be applied to both children and adolescents, and require parents to relate to their children and provide reasoning behind limits or restrictions.

A: Acknowledge the feeling.

When children hear that you know how they are feeling, they are more likely to feel seen and understood. It is important to connect the feeling to the behavior.

Child example: “I know that you are so angry and want to hit me...”

Teen example: “I know that you are angry that you cannot sleep over at Kara’s house this weekend...”

C: Communicate the limit.

Children have a right to their feelings, but they don’t have a right to behave destructively or disrespectfully.

Child example: "...but I'm not for hitting"

Teen example: "...but we are committed to have dinner with your grandparents for their anniversary on Saturday night."

T: Target alternatives.

There's nothing wrong with the impulse/desire, but it needs to be expressed safely/responsibly. Additionally, the child should feel like they have a part in the decision making process.

Child example: "You can choose to hit the teddy bear or you can choose to hit the pillow."

Teen example: "You can choose to have Kara over Sunday afternoon or you can choose to have her over next weekend."

After 3 repetitions introduce choice/consequence if child is not complying

Also, it's important for a child to understand they are responsible for their choices.

An example for a child might sound like this "In choosing to hit your brother, you've chosen to lose TV time today." An example for a teen might sound like, "In choosing to take the car without permission, you've chosen to lose the car for a week."

You may feel like you are reading from a script at first, but by integrating this dialogue into your daily communications with your kids, you will set a consistent standard and, in turn, help your kids clearly understand their place.