

BOUNDARY SETTING FOR 0-5 YEAR OLDS...



Setting clear and healthy boundaries for preschool children is an important part of childhood. Boundaries give children a sense of security from where they can explore their world.

IN THIS RESOURCE:

- The importance of boundaries
- Consistency is key
- Respond rather than react
- Consequence versus punishment

THE IMPORTANCE OF BOUNDARIES

It is a normal part of childhood to want to push the limits and test the boundaries. It is our job as parents or caregivers to set boundaries that are clear, consistent and that use logical reasoning to reinforce the expectation that they should be followed.



CONSISTENCY IS KEY

Children thrive off consistency. It reinforces their sense of security and helps them better understand what is expected of them and when. When it comes to limit setting, keeping the boundaries clear and consistent is key to making sure they are followed. Of course, there are times where limits need to be stretched, so it is important to make sure that as parents or caregivers we are firm, fair and also flexible when the need arises.

Making sure that we are consistent most of the time, will help to ensure that on those rare occasions where flexibility is needed, the child will understand that this is a special occasion and will continue to comply with the boundaries.

It is important to note that where possible, limits should be enforced consistently by all adults in a child's life. Parents, caregivers, grandparents and any other adults who may be responsible for the child, should all be on the same page and be consistent in the way they enforce boundaries and deliver consequences.

DON'T OVERDO IT

It is a common parenting mistake to overload our children with rules and commands and expect them to follow them. The problem with this, is that children become confused and it is inevitable that misbehaviour will occur, whether intentional or not.

Rather, have a think about what is important for your whānau and what is not so important and try coming up with 5-10 household 'rules' that are non-negotiable.

Remember, these 'rules' should be more focused on protection than control.



KEEP IT POSITIVE

It's often tempting to focus on the behaviour that we deem as unacceptable and tell our tamariki what we don't want from them. The problem is that adults think that it is only logical to know what the 'right' behaviour is when the 'wrong' one has been pointed out to us, but unfortunately, our kids don't work like that.

Limits work far better when they focus on the behaviour we want to see, rather than what we don't want. For example, it is more effective to explain to a child that "we eat dinner at the table" rather than "do not eat on the couch". This increases the chances that our rules will be followed, as our tamariki will know exactly what is expected from them.

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RESPONDING, RATHER THAN REACTING

As parents or caregivers, we often 'react' to our children's behaviour, which in instances where safety is at risk, is a completely acceptable response. However, when safety is not an issue and it is clear that boundaries are being tested, it is far more effective to take some time and 'respond' to the child's behaviour instead.

This involves paying attention to our children's behaviour and pointing out the positives before they turn into negatives.

For instance, if you see your child playing nicely with another child but a conflict is brewing, point out how well they are socialising, before the conflict occurs. This increases the likelihood that your child will choose a more positive behaviour, rather than engaging in the conflict and possibly prevent a negative interaction and need for a consequence.



CONSEQUENCE VERSUS PUNISHMENT

It is inevitable that at some point, your child will cross a boundary and a consequence will need to be given. In these instances, it is important to remember that consequences are not punishments. The aim is not to shame or persecute the child, but rather, to provide them with the lessons and skills to make more appropriate choices in future.

When delivering a consequence, it is important to ensure that consequences are consistent, i.e. the same consequence for the same behaviour and that they are appropriate for the given behaviour. A consequence that is too extreme, or illogical, will not be effective in teaching the child and may cause emotional harm.

Making the child aware of the consequences before the behaviour happens, provides the child with opportunity to make appropriate choices and avoid the need for a consequence. For instance, explaining to your child that we do not go out the front door without an adult, the reasons why, and the consequence that will happen if they do choose to go out the door, will increase the chances that your child will choose not to go out the door at all. Waiting until the child has already gone out the door and then reprimanding them will only cause confusion and emotional upset.



BE RESPECTFUL

Limits and boundaries are more effective when they are delivered in a calm and respectful manner. They are teaching tools that we use to guide, nurture and protect our children from harm. They should not be used to scare children into submission.

When children understand the need for a boundary and that it comes from a warm and loving place, they are more likely to follow it. Likewise, if children feel they have outgrown a particular boundary, they will push it.

It is our role as parents or caregivers to guide this process, recognise when flexibility is needed and also gently guide our children back onto the right path when necessary.

**“MAI I TE KŌPAE KI TE URUPA,
TĀTOU AKO TONU AI”**

From the cradle to the grave,
we are forever learning.



REFERENCES:

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