





# CHILD-PARENT-RELATIONSHIP (C-P-R) TRAINING

## Limit Setting: A-C-T Before It's Too Late! - Session 4

### Acknowledge the feeling Communicate the limit Target alternatives

#### Three Step A-C-T Method of Limit Setting:

*Scenario: Billy has been pretending that the bop bag is a bad guy and shooting him with the dart gun; he looks over at you and aims the dart gun at you, then laughs and says, "Now, you're one of the bad guys, too!"*

1. **A**cknowledge your child's feeling or desire (*your voice must convey empathy and understanding*).  
**"Billy, I know that you think that it would be fun to shoot me, too..."**  
*Child learns that his feelings, desires, and wishes are valid and accepted by parent (but not all behavior); just empathically reflecting your child's feeling often defuses the intensity of the feeling or need.*
2. **C**ommunicate the limit (be specific and clear—and brief).  
**"But I'm not for shooting."**
3. **T**arget acceptable alternatives (provide one or more choices, depending on age of child).  
**"You can pretend that the doll is me (pointing at the doll) and shoot at it."**  
*The goal is to provide your child with an acceptable outlet for expressing the feeling or the original action, while giving him an opportunity to exercise self-control. Note: Pointing helps redirect child's attention.*

#### When to Set Limits?

##### **RULE OF THUMB: "During play sessions, limits are not needed until they are needed!"**

Limits are set only when the need arises, and for four basic reasons:

- To protect child from hurting himself or parent
- To protect valuable property
- To maintain parent's acceptance of child
- To provide consistency in the play session by limiting child and toys to play area and ending on time

Before setting a limit in a play session, ask yourself:

- "Is this limit necessary?"
- "Can I consistently enforce this limit?"
- "If I don't set a limit on this behavior, can I consistently allow this behavior and accept my child?"

Avoid conducting play sessions in areas of the house that require too many limits. Limits set during play sessions should allow for greater freedom of expression than would normally be allowed. The fewer the limits, the easier it is for you to be consistent—**consistency is very important**. Determine a few limits ahead of time (practice A-C-T): no hitting or shooting at parent; no playdough on carpet; no purposefully breaking toys, and so forth. *Hint: Children really do understand that playtimes are "special" and that the rules are different—they will not expect the same level of permissiveness during the rest of the week.*

#### How to Set Limits?

Limits are not punitive and should be stated firmly, but calmly and matter-of-factly. After empathically acknowledging your child's feeling or desire (very important step), you state, "The playdough is not for throwing at the table," just like you would state, "The sky is blue." Don't try to force your child to obey the limit. Remember to provide an acceptable alternative. In this method, it really is up to the child to decide to accept or break the limit; however, **it is your job, as the parent, to consistently enforce the limit.**

#### Why Establish Consistent Limits?

Providing children with consistent limits helps them feel safe and secure. This method of limiting children's behavior teaches them self-control and responsibility for their own behavior by allowing them to experience the consequences of their choices and decisions. Limits set in play sessions help children practice self-control and begin to learn to stop themselves in the real world.

**CONSISTENT LIMITS → PREDICTABLE, SAFE ENVIRONMENT → SENSE OF SECURITY**

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## Limit Setting: A-C-T Practice Worksheet - Session 4

Acknowledge the feeling  
Communicate the limit  
Target alternatives

### EXAMPLE # 1

Billy has been playing like the bop bag is the bad guy and hitting him; he picks up the scissors, looks at you, and then laughs and says, "I'm going to stab him, because he's bad!"

- A "Billy, I know that you think that it would be fun to stab the bop bag (bobo)..."
- C "but the bop bag (bobo) isn't for poking with the scissors."
- T "You can use the rubber knife."

### EXAMPLE # 2

The play session time is up and you have stated the limit two times. Your child becomes angry because you won't give in and let him play longer; he begins to hit you. Hitting is not allowed, so go immediately to second step of A-C-T, then follow with all three steps of A-C-T method of limit setting.

- C (firmly) "Billy, I'm not for hitting."
- A (empathically) "I know you're mad at me..."
- C (firmly) "But people aren't for hitting."
- T (neutral tone) "You can pretend the bop bag is me and hit it (pointing at bop bag)."

### PRACTICE:

1. Your child begins to color on the dollhouse, saying, "It needs some red curtains!"  
 (assuming you bought a dollhouse; however, it would be okay to color on a cardboard box/dollhouse)
  - A I know you really want to \_\_\_\_\_.
  - C But the dollhouse \_\_\_\_\_.
  - T You can \_\_\_\_\_.
  
2. Your child aims a loaded dart gun at you.
  - A \_\_\_\_\_.
  - C \_\_\_\_\_.
  - T \_\_\_\_\_.

3. After 15 minutes of the play session, your child announces that she wants to leave and go outside to play with her friends.

A \_\_\_\_\_

C \_\_\_\_\_

I \_\_\_\_\_

4. Your child wants to play doctor and asks you to be the patient. Your child asks you to pull up your shirt so that she/he can listen to your heart.

A \_\_\_\_\_

C \_\_\_\_\_

I \_\_\_\_\_

5. Describe a situation in which you think you might need to set a limit during the play session.

Situation: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

A \_\_\_\_\_

C \_\_\_\_\_

I \_\_\_\_\_

# CHILD-PARENT-RELATIONSHIP (C-P-R) TRAINING

## Parent Play Session Notes - Session 4

Play Session # \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Happenings:**

**What I Learned About My Child:**

Feelings Expressed:

Play Themes:

**What I Learned About Myself:**

My feelings during the play session:

What I think I was best at:

What was hardest or most challenging for me:

**Questions or Concerns:**

**Skill I Want to Focus on in the Next Play Session:** \_\_\_\_\_