

A.C.T APPROACH



Here are the steps of the ACT Approach: Acknowledge, Communicate boundaries or limits, and Target alternatives. Limits are used to create a safe atmosphere for children. Limits help children learn that they are responsible for what happens to them if they make a choice to break a limit after they have been previously warned and informed of the consequences. A firm, precise 3-step sequence of stating the limit, giving a warning, and enforcing the consequence is used.

1 Acknowledge

2 Communicate

3 Target

1. **Acknowledge** your child's feeling or want. This lets the child know that you do understand.

I know you would like to watch more TV.

I can tell you don't want to leave the party now.

I can see you are really angry with Johnny for breaking your toy.

I know you love playing games on your Ipad.

2. **Communicate** the limit. State the rule or tell what needs to be done.

But the TV time is over.

But it's time to leave now.

But Johnny is not for hitting.

But you also have to do your schoolwork.

3. Target the alternative.

You can choose to turn the TV off, or you can choose for me to turn it off.

You can choose to hold my hand and walk out with me, or you can choose to walk out on your own.

You can choose to tell him that you are angry.

If you choose to do school work for 2 hours per day, you choose to play your games for 1 hour that same day. If you choose not to do your schoolwork, you choose not to play your games the same day. What do you choose? *Note I have used the word "choose" 5 times.

When limits need to be set, it's time to ACT.



A.C.T LIMIT SETTING

The limit setting skill is designed to keep you and your child safe. It also establishes parental authority when needed and helps children become more responsible for their actions. With an effective limit setting by the parents, children learn that they are responsible for what happens to them if they make a choice to break a limit after they have been previously warned and informed of the consequences. This skill provides the boundaries for the child. The parent tries to keep limits at a minimum so that children have a better chance of remembering them. Having fewer limits also helps foster an atmosphere, which permits freer expression of feelings.

1. In setting limits, consider whether the limit is necessary for the child's safety, your safety, or the protection of toys or property.
2. Limits need to be stated and enforced consistently so that children learn that the parent "means what he/she says" and to reduce the amount of testing behaviour children exhibit.
3. A three-step sequence of stating the limit, giving a warning, and enforcing the consequence is used.

Stating the limit

When a child breaks or obviously is about to break one of the limits, the parent states the limit to the child in a clear, brief, specific manner. The tone of voice should be pleasant but firm and forceful. Use the child's name, reflect the child's desire to do the prohibited action, and then state the limit

Example: "[Child's name], you want to hit your sister when you feel she irritates you, but people are not for hitting. If you choose to hit her, you choose to not (the consequence must be linked to something that's of importance to the child) play with your legos for the rest of the day)

This procedure helps the child learn that he/she is responsible for his/her own choices and behaviours and the outcomes associated with them.

LIMIT SETTING CONT.



WHAT TO DO WHEN SETTING THE LIMITS IS NOT WORKING:

You have been careful several times to:

1. Reflect the child's feelings,
2. Set clear, fair limits.
3. Give the child an alternate way to express his feelings.

The child continues to deliberately disobey. What do you do?

1. Look for natural causes for rebellion: fatigue, sickness, hunger, extreme stress, abuse/neglect, etc. Take care of physical needs and crises before expecting cooperation.
2. Remain in control, respecting yourself and the child: you are not a failure if your child rebels and your child is not bad. All kids need to 'practice' rebelling.
3. Set reasonable consequences for disobedience: let the child choose to obey or disobey, but set a fair consequence for disobedience. Example: "If you choose to hit your brother, you choose to go to your room."
4. Never tolerate violence: Reflect the child's anger and provide compassionate control and alternatives.
5. If the child refuses to choose, you choose for him: the child's refusal to choose is also a choice. Set the consequences. Example: "If you choose not to (choice A... or B), then you have chosen for me to pick the one that is most convenient for me."
6. **ENFORCE THE CONSEQUENCES:** "Don't draw your gun unless you intend to shoot." If you crumble under your child's anger and tears, you have abdicated your role as a parent and lost your power. **GET TOUGH: TRY AGAIN.**
7. Recognize signs of depression: The chronically angry or rebellious child is in emotional trouble and needs professional help.



TECHNIQUE

Techniques found effective in increasing the power of both parent/caregiver and child:

1. Lower one's voice and talk softly.
2. Use the child's name over and over in a reassuring voice.
3. Refer to the child's last success and compliance.
4. Use silence for thirty to sixty seconds as the child's aggression builds.
5. Leave the room giving the child time to gain self-control and thus 'save face'.
6. Switch the subjects of conflict to some topic of a non-threatening nature for a few moments.
7. Give permission to be angry.
8. Exaggerate the conflict to humorous proportions. Be careful when you use this approach as you do not want to tease your child.
9. Interpret the aggression to the child- determine and discuss the true origin of the aggressive behaviour.
10. Be a crisis anticipator- not a crisis intervenor. Prevent a crisis before it happens, if possible.

Through an understanding of aggression and the use of techniques stated above, one can go beyond simple 'child control' to the more complex and challenging task of 'child development'.