



# THERAPY NEWS

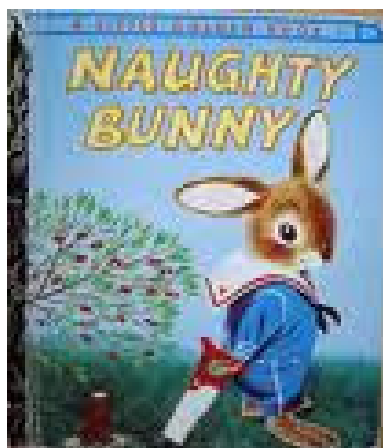
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## Successful Limit Setting with Children

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For those who work with children, having a set of useful teaching points to give to parents about child management is essential. Most all teachers, therapists and pediatricians are asked for direction on how to set limit with children. In Filial and Child-Parent Relationship Therapy, limit setting is taught to parents to strengthen relationships, resolve emotional problems and manage behaviors (Guerney, 1995; Landreth & Bratton, 2006). For the purposes of instructing parents on daily issues, it helps to give a simple step-by-step process to

which they can refer. But parent education should also include the basic ideology behind the suggested process. The true purpose of limit setting methods is to help children learn how to effectively manage their own behaviors in pro-social directions. When the adults 'put the ball in the child's court,' giving them practice taking responsibility for their own control, kids are given self-management tools for a variety of settings. Self-regulation is important to the overall success of the child into adulthood.



*Naughty Bunny* (1959)  
Author - Richard Scarry  
The story of a mischievous bunny.

*Before I got married I had six theories about bringing up children; now I have six children, and no theories."*  
- John Wilmot



### Limit-Setting Basics

- State the limit clearly & concretely.
- Set the initial limit without giving any consequences.
- Pick an adverse, but fair consequence, to be most effective.
- Consequences should have limited periods of time; usually no more than a day for perceived fairness.
- Always follow through on the stated consequence.
- Only choose the consequence you are willing to enforce.
- BE CONSISTENT- Especially with your follow through!
- Always use empathy in the context of setting limits by recognizing the child's underlying emotions for a sense of validation. Scuka, R. F., (2010).

## Underlying Values of Limit Setting

### Parental Suggestions:

Prior to setting a limit, it may be helpful to initially provide structuring, parent messages and positive reinforcement for obedience. Structuring gives a clear, directive option for the bad behavior, "Go play in your room." Parent messages indicate how the child's behavior affects the parent, "You disappoint me when you fight with Jake." With compliance, give verbal positive reinforcement, "You did a great job of stopping yourself from arguing today." (Guerney, 1995).

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In addition to serving adults,  
families and couples, I am  
dedicated to the art of healing  
children through  
the Power of Play  
- New client now accepted

## References

Guerney, L. (1995). *Parenting: A skills training manual* (5th ed.), Silver Spring, MD: Relationship Press.

Landreth, G. (2002). *Play Therapy: Art of the Relationship*. Brunner-Routledge, New York, NY.

Scuka, R. F. (2010). The rationale and principles of effective limit setting. *Play-therapy*, 5(2) 10-14.



*Looking Forward to Springtime!*

If the previous tactics are unsuccessful, the parents can now decide to set a limit without adding the consequence. "Stop fighting with Joe." Here we want to give the child a chance to self-correct without the limit. We also want to avoid making matters more volatile with provocation of a threat. Parents should avoid giving messages that they don't have faith that the child will make the right choices on their own. If the child continues with his negative actions, state the limit and add the undesirable outcome, "If you don't stop arguing with Joe; no video games for the rest of the day." Here the child knows it is his *second chance* to show that he can get a grasp on his negative behaviors and to avoid what is objectionable from occurring—losing his video games! If the stated consequence must be imposed because the child's aversive conduct endures, it is imperative to follow-up with the implied penalty. An important point is for the child to understand the choice was his to continue the behaviors and face a consequence. "Since you've chosen to keep quarreling with your brother, you have chosen to give up your video games until tomorrow." The child's failure to self-regulate his actions is a teachable moment that there is a direct connection between a consequence and their choice for

non-compliance with the original limit. Again, the central point here is to help teach the child how to manage their own behaviors. The success of limit setting is further enhanced with the use of *empathy*. The parent will want the child to also feel heard and understood within the framework of their unwanted behaviors. It makes it easier for the child to accept the limit, as they feel the parent understands what they are personally experiencing. An alternative method of limit setting by Landreth (2002) begins with recognizing the child's emotions, needs and desires.

The ACT sequence is as follows:

A – Acknowledge child's feelings, wishes & needs.

C – Communicate the limit.

T – Target acceptable alternatives.

When giving a limit with consequences, the parent could add, "I know *you are upset* with Joe, but you also know you aren't allowed to fight. If you don't stop arguing, you will lose your games." *What if the child resumes his behavior the next day?* Once the child knows the limit, but chooses to break it again, parents go to setting a limit with consequences immediately, unless the child is young or has processing limits.