

Table 4. Comparison of Firm and Soft Limits

	Firm limits	Soft limits
Characteristics	<p>Stated in clear, direct, concrete behavioral terms.</p> <p>Words supported by actions.</p> <p>Compliance expected and required.</p> <p>Provide information needed to make acceptable choices and cooperate.</p> <p>Provide accountability.</p>	<p>Stated in unclear terms or as mixed messages.</p> <p>Actions do not support intended rule.</p> <p>Compliance optional, not required.</p> <p>Do not provide information needed to make acceptable choices.</p> <p>Lack accountability.</p>
Predictable outcomes	<p>Cooperation.</p> <p>Decreased limit testing</p> <p>Clear understanding of rules and expectations.</p> <p>Regard teacher's words seriously.</p>	<p>Resistance.</p> <p>Increased limit testing.</p> <p>Escalating misbehavior, power struggles.</p> <p>Ignore and tune out teacher's words.</p>
What children learn	<p>No means no.</p> <p>"I'm expected and required to follow the rules."</p> <p>"Rules apply to me like everyone else."</p> <p>"I am responsible for my own behavior."</p> <p>Adults mean what they say.</p>	<p>No means yes, sometimes, or maybe.</p> <p>"I'm not expected to follow rules."</p> <p>"Rules are for others, not me."</p> <p>"Adults are responsible for my behavior."</p> <p>Adults don't mean what they say.</p>