

## ACT Limit Setting



### Acknowledge the Feeling

For your child to know that you understand or can see how they're feeling, helps them feel heard.

**"I can see that you are frustrated and want to throw the ball inside..."**



### Communicate the Limit

We want a child to feel safe to express their feelings, however not in a way that is unsafe/not ok. Focus on the behaviour/action, rather than the child.

**Instead of saying "You can't throw that", you can say "but the ball is not to be thrown inside"**

## ACT Limit Setting



### Target Alternatives

We need to offer options and choice to a child on how to express that feeling. 1 choice for young children, 2-3 for older.

**"You can choose to throw the ball outside or you can choose to throw a pillow to the wall".**



### If able, provide co-regulation

If it is safe to do so, you can offer to join in and be present with your child in their feelings, to provide support, coaching and modelling to express these feelings in a safe way.

# A-C-T

## Acknowledge the Feeling

- Identifying and validating the child's feeling makes them feel seen and heard.
- Example: "You are feeling so mad right now!"

## Communicate the Limit

- Setting boundaries is important in helping children learn. Doing so in a way that focuses on the action and not on the child as a person is important. For example, instead of saying, "Don't you hit him!", you can say:
  - Example: "Your brother is not for hitting".

## Target an alternative

- Giving the child choices of what they can do helps them refocus their behavior. Instead of focusing on the "I can't" or "They said no", the child can now focus on, "Here are my choices".
  - Example: "You can choose to hit a pillow or bean bag instead".

*"You are feeling so mad right now AND your brother is not for hitting. You can choose to hit a pillow or bean bag instead."*

ACT is a model developed by play therapy pioneer, Dr. Garry Landreth, in order to help parents, teachers and caregivers set and communicate limits with children in a developmentally appropriate manner. This three-step process helps the child learn that it is okay to feel all different kinds of feelings and it is still not okay to engage in unsafe or inappropriate behavior.

Another Example:

*"You are feeling frustrated that it is not working how you want it to! And, the toy is not for throwing. You can rip paper or throw this squishy ball!"*

## OTHER NOTES:

- Make sure alternatives/choices you provide the child are all choices that are acceptable to you.
- You can adjust the language to fit the child's developmental level. For example, using ACT with older children might sound like, "I get that you're disappointed that you can't go over to Bob's house today. Today is a day for family time. You can invite Bob over tomorrow or see if you can go to his house on Sunday".
- Be mindful of your own delivery. Try to be calm, firm and confident.



## Co-regulation vs Co-escalation

- Offer choices (realistic ones that you are okay with)
- Showing Empathy
- Calm, neutral voice
- Making Demands
- Threatening Consequences
- Yelling/heightening

***What if my child STILL doesn't listen after I do these 3 steps?". If that is the case, you can add a consequence. While still providing a choice, you may say...***

“If you choose to \_\_\_\_\_ [unwanted behavior], then you are choosing to \_\_\_\_\_ [consequence]. If you choose to \_\_\_\_\_ [desired behavior], then you are choosing to \_\_\_\_\_ [reward/absence of consequence]. Which do you choose?”

- Example 1: “If you choose to hit me again, then you are choosing to go to your room. If you choose to be gentle, then you choose to get to stay on my lap. Which do you choose?”
- Example 2: “If you choose to whine about the cookies now, then you are choosing to not have any cookies after dinner. If you choose to wait patiently and eat your dinner, then you choose to have a cookie later. Which do you choose?”
- Example 3: “If you choose to stay out of bed, then you are choosing to give up your TV time tomorrow. If you choose to get in bed now, then you choose to have your TV time tomorrow. Which do you choose?”