

HOME LEARNING PACK

Setting limits – Montessori Style

By Simone Davies

When my son was a toddler, he hated leaving places. So, I would begin to dread when it was time to go home. I'd be thinking, "how am I going to get him to leave soon?" No matter how long we stayed, there were always tears.

And did I mention that I was exhausted by the end too?

I understand the difficulty with setting limits. It is not easy to see our child suffer. Even more when we feel like we are the ones making them cry as we carry them from the playground.

So, it's something I'm always trying out. Finding the balance between giving clear boundaries, allowing the child time, and giving understanding and empathy when they are sad.

Montessori-style (vs permissive vs authoritarian)

How to Talk Montessori-style. We look at ways to avoid always saying 'no' to our child and at what we could say instead.

So perhaps you are starting to think "If I can't say 'No' to my child then do I have to let them do everything they want?" And this at the expense of the adult whose energy is completely drained trying to always meet the needs of their child.

In fact, the Montessori approach is neither 'permissive' nor 'authoritarian'. It is actually an approach where children have freedom, but within clear and consistent limits.

It means that we are compassionate, respectful and supportive as we guide our children.

So today we are going to dive in a little deeper to those tricky situations when we would like to set a limit, or where safety is involved.

And if we are not going to say "no", what are we going to say?



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1. Clarity

Ugh. I'm about to say those words 'clear' and 'consistent'. I know that it is super hard. One day we have lots of patience. And the next we are tired and feeling reactive ourselves. So, what I've found helps is to have clear house rules. Not too many that our children roll their eyes as we wheel out our scroll of rules. But just enough to be clear on what is important in our house.

Some examples:

"We are kind to each other in this house"

"We eat at the table"

"Rough play by mutual consent" (I have even used this with young children and they understand what I mean even if they don't understand all the words)

"Use your words, not your fists"

2. With love

Setting limits with love means that we: get down to their height; use a voice that is firm but loving; cross the room rather than shouting from where we are; manage our own anger first (remember to breathe or leave the room if we have to); give respect and empathy when they are sad/angry/frustrated etc; and are there to hold them or keep them safe if they lose control

For example, when they are sad to leave the park, as we are leaving and they are crying, we can say, "You really wish you could stay at the park. You were having so much fun!"

3. With reason

Sometimes a child asks us, "Why?" and we answer, "Because I said so". Even if we are really tired and have been repeating ourselves over and over, I really think it's important to have a reason for setting a limit and being able to communicate it to our children.

For example,

"I can't let you hit me. My safety is important to me. But you can hit this pillow instead."



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4. With ability and age in mind

The amount of freedom (and limits) will depend on the child's age and ability. The limits we set will change and need to be modified as our child grows. Generally, as the child shows increasing responsibility.

We tend to be wary of negotiation as we want to be in control. I'm not saying this should happen when they are throwing themselves on the ground making demands to get their way. But – particularly with older children – if they feel like a house rule should change, then this should be open to discussion and to find a way so that we are all happy.

For example, a 2-year old could choose from two items of suitable clothing, while an older child will largely make their own choice of what they want to wear.

A child who is 2 years old needs to hold an adult's hand whilst walking along the street, whilst an older child learns to be capable of crossing the road alone.

5. Working together

People like to feel like they have autonomy and aren't being controlled, children included. So, when we nag and try to control things too much, we have a child that wants to rebel or who submits.

Instead, let's work with our children to find a way to meet their needs and our own.

For example,

"It sounds like you need to climb, and I so want to keep you safe. I don't know how yet, but I want to meet both of these needs."

It's amazing what creativity can happen when we work with our child to set the limits together. Try it and you may well be surprised.

6. For safety

Where safety is involved like walking on the street or being near a hot oven or electricity, there is no room for being vague or unclear.

We can tell them the rule while physically and gently removing them, so they know that "Don't touch" or "Stay out of the street" really means "move away from that object" or "move out of the street." We may have to repeat ourselves a lot as they learn and check the rule still applies every time. But when we physically remove them, they will receive our message more clearly.



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Don't forget!

When setting limits, it is important to be in strong connection with our child. If we are not getting much compliance, I would step back and start to fill our child's emotional bucket and rebuild connection.

And if we set a limit and our child has a tantrum, refer back to how to deal with tantrums.

*LOOK OUT FOR THE NEXT HOME LEARNING PACK
for Dealing with tantrums.*

