

Another challenge that caregivers of toddlers face is their impulsivity. This is the beginning of their learning about boundaries and cause effect, and is a time for caregivers and parents to set limits. Toddlers are unable to consciously realize the consequences of their behavior. There are several basic steps to be used in the limit-setting process. Limit-setting works better when the adult acknowledges the child's feelings, wishes and wants, communicates the limits clearly, and targets acceptable behavior. These steps can be summed up in the acronym, ACT.

A - Acknowledge the child's feelings, wishes and wants.

C - Communicate the limit.

T - Target acceptable behavior.

A: Acknowledging the child's feelings, wishes and wants conveys acceptance of the child's motivation. By understanding, we are saying that their inner-self and emotions are okay.

"You seem angry."

"You wanted the puzzle."

"You were hoping mommy would stay longer."

"You wanted to climb."

C: Communicate the limit in specific and clear ways. No doubt should exist in the child's mind as to what is appropriate and what is inappropriate. Use an assertive "BIG" voice.

"Stop. Climbing on the table is not safe."

"Stop. Hitting hurts."

"OUCH. Pulling hair hurts."

"OUCH. Biting hurts. It's not safe."

T: Target acceptable behavior by giving the child alternatives for the expression of the original desired action.

"OUCH, pulling hair hurts. Touch me like this."

"Stop. Climbing on the dollhouse is not safe. You may climb on the stairs or the climber."

"Stop. Hitting hurts. Say, *My turn, my turn.*"

Use the ACT steps whenever you set limits.

Small Group Activity

Practice the ACT steps with the following scenarios:

1. Climbing on tables
2. Walking on cardboard boxes
3. Throwing toys
4. Grabbing toys from a friend
5. Throwing sand
6. Eating playdough
7. Walking in front of the swing

