

# Setting limits to promote a healthy development for children.

One of the kindest things we can do for children is to set limits for them. Saying no can be super important. Children do not always know best what is good for them. They know what they want and what feels most important right now. But what is good for them in the long run? What do they need in order to be able to develop into human beings who function well at school, at work and in relationships with others?

It is a common misunderstanding we set limits when the child misbehaves. As adults, we are role models in everything we do when interacting with the child during the time we spend together. We show them how we can talk to each other in an okay manner, calmly and respectfully, or with angry voices. Through our own moral attitudes and the way we act we teach the child what is okay and where the limit is crossed. It is, in a way, the children's job to find out where the limits are, and our responsibility to help them become secure in this regard. We do this by liking them for who they are, but also by setting safe frameworks and limits.

Children today are often good at negotiating, and that's a good thing. It is important that children are taken seriously, to be allowed to present their wishes and needs, and to be met by adults who listen. When we actually try to understand why something is important to the child, we can show them that we understand. Even though we understand, saying no will often still be the right thing to do. We can understand without yielding.

Saying no to children can create a lot of frustration. The child can get angry with us, and it can feel hard. But expressing one's own opinions is part of a normal development for children. Remember that children don't take in new knowledge when they are scared. So the more we shout and grab a hold of the child, the longer the periods of frustration and emotional rupture with the child will last. They are able to work through their frustration faster if we manage to be good role models and talk to the child the way we want the child to talk to us.

Example:

Thinking: "This is not okay - I have to stop this. But first I'll check and adjust my own emotional state. I am frustrated and irritated and feel the need to raise my voice and show that I am the one who makes the decisions. But that's probably not a good idea. What is wise to do now? Long exhalation. Okay, now I'm ready. But what about Sofie's emotional state? She is probably quite tired, it has been a long time since she ate, and she has been struggling with her friends today. She looks like she wants a fight to get her frustration out, but I guess that's not what she really needs. I must try to meet her with understanding. I will approach her, make contact, and choose a gentle, friendly voice.

"Sophie? What you are doing now is not okay, you need to stop. Maybe you are tired? I noticed that you were upset before. That is understandable because what happened was not alright. What can we do now that can make it better?"

In this situation the adult manages to communicate clearly and set limits for the child, and he does it in a manner that the child still can feel secure and. He is being a good adult for the child. This way the situation calms down more quickly, and it becomes easier for the child to make good choices going forward.