

Setting Limits Tip Sheet

Why do we set limits?

It is easy to assume that students know what we expect; however, there will be many times when the students will not know (even though we believe we have clearly stated what we expect). Often, students who are unclear about expectations will become increasingly agitated and disorganized. These students may wander around the class during less structured times (not sure what to do), or may find it difficult to get started on their work assignment.

At times, these students may become defiant and refuse to comply with an expectation. If a student is refusing - verbally or physically - to comply with an expectation, we must clarify and set limits. Providing clear expectations and consistently setting appropriate limits provides structure and safety in a classroom.

How do we set limits?

1. First identify the problem. If you find yourself constantly redirecting behaviour (getting students back on task), they may not be clear regarding what is expected.
2. Clearly state what is expected. Consider how the students best understand information

and any possible learning disabilities. Could the students be unclear because they need the instruction delivered in a different way?

3. Clearly state what will happen if the expectations are not followed (consequences). Always give a choice and state the positive side of the choice before the negative. Students often only hear the first few words you say.
4. Allow students time to process the request. Research shows girls and boys react differently: boys take longer to process responses. Be patient.
5. If the student does not follow through, enforce the consequences laid out in step three.
6. Provide student with positive options and alternatives not ultimatums.

Enhancing Limit Setting

- Always be fair and reasonable
- Plan to meet needs
- Plan with knowledge of risk and protective factors
- If this is a student you do not generally work with, consider that your handling of the situation may differ from what the student is used to - resulting in confusion or frustration
- Remember that non-compliance is not personal

Strategies to Avoid:

- Using power techniques such as “because I said so”
- Setting limits you are not able or prepared to enforce
- Arguing with the student – this serves to fuel, confuse and/or aggravate

Children respond well to an educator who sets fair, reasonable and clear limits. This provides a sense of security, structure and predictability that promotes a positive learning environment.

Notes:
