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## Setting Limits

Parental limits keep children safe until they achieve independence and have the ability to keep themselves safe. It is common for children who experience difficulties adjusting to preschool to have problems following rules. In fact, they typically prefer to make up their own rules. If a child gets into the habit of trying to make others follow his or her own rules then preschool becomes a place for getting around rules instead of learning.

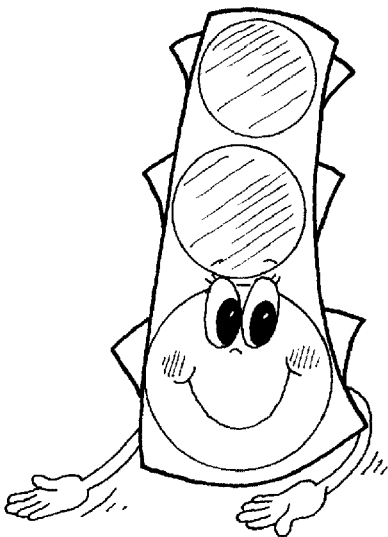
Children who don't stay within set limits feel out of control. Teaching them to stay within limits at home helps them to develop self-control in other settings as well. Help your child practice by taking small steps and

providing a lot of encouragement.

### Using Time-Out

You want to make absolutely sure that your child can do the task you ask them to do. If your child is confused about your directions or not sure how to perform the task, the behavior may seem like noncompliance, but in fact it may be a lack of skill. If your child has to be put in time-out for the same behavior over and over, either your child does not know how to perform the task or your child is using time-out to escape an unpleasant task. Teach your child during a calm period exactly what your expectations are for the request and directive you give.

For example, if your child grabs a toy from another child and hits him with the toy, you tell your child to ask for the toy nicely and to stop hitting. If your child continues to hit, you ask your child to go to time-out. If this happens several times, you may want to teach the correct way to ask for a toy. When your child is playing nicely, say, "You are playing so nicely. You are making good choices." Role play and say, "Would it be OK for you to do this?" Grab a toy from your child. "No, it is not OK! Let me show you the right way to get the toy." Then show a more acceptable way. For example, say, "May I have the toy please?" Have your child practice doing it



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positive feedback for playing nicely. When your child is doing it right with a peer be sure to give them positive feedback or even a small surprise treat.

Most children like to do what makes them feel good. Learning to accept limits is difficult. Teach your child your expectations, acknowledge when he or she is following the limits, and redirect your child when necessary. If your child is upset, examples of redirection include: "Could you help me carry these towels to the bathroom? You are such a good helper! Let's go look and see how your favorite truck is doing. Can you show me how you can make it go backwards?"

Another example is: You have told you child many times not to throw toys around in the house, but you see him or her throwing a ball against the wall. Instead of getting angry you say, "Let's throw the ball outside. We throw balls outside. Let's see how well you can throw the ball outside."

You can also use humor to redirect your child. An example: you notice your child getting frustrated while playing with blocks. You say, "Oh these silly blocks just don't want to stack today. Maybe we'll have to put them outside the door for awhile. What do you think?"

Another example of humor is: your child doesn't want to get dressed. Rather than fighting, use a funny voice and pretend to be the shirt: "Oh I just love to creep over your cute face and snuggle around your arms. Here I go... Oh, thank you for letting me be with you all day!"

Time-out may be needed if a child is still having trouble following rules. Be careful not to overuse it. Time-out is to be used in circumstances of

oppositional and out-of-control behavior only. Your first obligation is to keep your child and others safe.

Guidelines for Using Time-Out when necessary

1. Be brief (no lectures)
2. Make simple, specific requests.
3. Be mild (neutral tone and calm, unemotional voice).
4. Be consistent
5. Provide an immediate consequence (e.g. loss of a privilege) if your child does not comply.
6. Teach your child to take himself/herself out of social situations when having a hard time.
7. Remove your child from a social activity when limits are not followed.
8. Give encouragement. Providing fun rewards/activities help your child stay motivated and reduces the need for time-out. Remember to give 3 praises or encouragement for every reprimand.
9. Minimize attention for inappropriate behavior.

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These activities are not a test to see whether your child knows the skills. If your child has trouble, give enough hints so that he or she can be successful. If the activity is too difficult or becomes frustrating, stop that activity and do something else that is fun. The main goal is to spend quality time with your child each day and to help your child be successful!

Activities 1 & 2 are copied from First Steps to Success, with permission from Sopris West Publisher, 2001. Activities 3 & 4 are from Growing Together, Lafayette, IN: February 2006. ([www.growingchild.com](http://www.growingchild.com))

# 1

## Traffic Lights

1. When driving the car on a walk, look for the traffic lights and show your child the red, yellow, and green lights.
2. Help your child notice what the cars do depending on the color.
3. Say "Tell me when the light is green, so we can go."
4. Then say "Tell me when you see a red light, so we can stop."

# 2

## Green Light, Go

1. Start off on opposite sides of the room or outside as far away as possible while still being able to hear. Say "The object of the game is for you to get to where I am by walking (not running) every time I say, 'green light.' You can only move when you hear me say, 'green Light.' Stop when I say, 'red light.' When you reach me, we switch roles."
2. Mix up what you say to fool your child into walking or stopping when it's not the right time.
3. You may need to use green and red paper for a visual cue.

# 3

## Inside/Outside Treasure Hunt

Give her player an egg carton that has twelve sections. Their job is to fill each section with a different object that will fit inside the section. Participants can hunt inside or outside.

When everyone is finished, they can compare collections and try to identify each object. For safety's sake, children under three years old should be accompanied by an adult since items this small may pose a choking hazard.

There are lots of variations on this game—participants can hunt in pairs or teams; lists of 12 items can be provided for a scavenger hunt; a time limit can be imposed.

# 4

## Personal Interaction

Play copycat:

- Make Faces
- Wave good-bye
- Hold up two fingers
- Play follow the leader
- Make an obstacle course with over, under, and around furniture
- Play hide and seek in reverse... one person hides and everyone has to find that person. Each one stays with the hidden person until everyone has found the one that hid.