

Healthy Limits, Healthy Kids

by Kathy Slattengren, M. Ed., [Priceless Parenting](#)

One life skill all kids need to learn is how to set limits for themselves. You are their first teacher in how to set healthy limits.

While your kids may complain about your limits, these parameters provide a sense of safety. Your kids know where the boundaries are. They know you are strong enough to enforce those boundaries.

Setting limits is necessary in your role as a parent. Your kids will push back and resist at times. At this point some parents give in to avoid the stress of enforcing the limits. These parents have reported undesirable results like:

- 3-year-old who regularly goes to bed at midnight
- 5-year-old who only eats goldfish crackers and macaroni and cheese
- 8-year-old who is obese
- 11-year-old who is addicted to watching porn
- 13-year-old who is up until 4:00 AM on the internet
- 14-year-old who does not help around the house
- 16-year-old who is failing classes



All these situations developed over weeks, months, or years. You can occasionally bend the rules. However, problems develop when you consistently don't enforce healthy limits. You experience the immediate relief of your child being satisfied but is it worth the future consequences?

Setting Essential Limits

Your kids will have different requirements at different ages for [creating well-being](#). Staying balanced requires healthy limits in these key areas:

- sleeping
- eating
- exercising
- playing
- studying
- helping out
- doing personal care
- connecting with friends
- connecting with family
- being on digital devices

When your kids are young, you need to be more actively involved in setting limits. This is one of the reasons experts recommend that children not be allowed to have TV and digital devices in their bedrooms. It's too hard to monitor what's going on so you can help set reasonable limits.

Once they are in elementary school, you and your children can discuss what limits should be set around things like screen time. After you have an agreement, they will likely need help abiding by those limits. By the time they are in high school, they need to be taking most of the responsibility for setting their own limits. Since they will soon be on their own, you want to give them plenty of practice when you are still

nearby.

Another area for your kids to practice setting their own limits is around going to bed and getting up. Most kids can handle this sometime during the elementary school years. One mom was complaining about how hard it was to get her teen out of bed in the mornings. When she realized she could turn this responsibility over to him, both their lives became better. She stopped nagging him out of bed and he enjoyed feeling competent about getting up himself.

Setting Limits Involving Moderation

Messages pour into children about all the wonderful things they should have - from the latest video games to the best tennis shoes. Do they need all these things? No, but they certainly want them!

You are left with the challenging task of teaching your children the difference between needs and wants. It's not easy learning moderation around spending money and finding out that you can't always have what you want. It's hard to say "no" to your kids when all the other kids seem to have it. However, if you want your kids to learn moderation, you must be able to say no and stick with it.

When Ann's son was preparing a list of all the things he would need for Middle School, he put a cellphone on the list. This led to a good discussion on the difference between wants and needs. While it was something he wanted, it was nothing he needed.

Teaching your kids moderation can help prevent serious trouble. Like adults, kids are susceptible to addiction. They quickly become accustomed to one level and want more - whether it's food, video games, drugs, shopping or the internet.

If you have ever tried to help someone get over an addiction, you know how challenging it is. Once someone is addicted, their ability to set reasonable limits on their own behavior is greatly reduced. It is far better to use moderation and avoid addiction in the first place.

One parent who reviewed the book [Reset Your Child's Brain](#) wrote "My son was a Minecraft addict. Innocent game, right? The problem is not with the theme of the game, but that it is conveyed via an electronic screen that sends signals to the brain that disrupts normative balance. He would only play on weekends, but at 3 hour intervals. His anger and his sensitivity to others made life in the family EXTREMELY difficult. I talked with him about what gaming was doing to his brain, and he agreed on a fast for a month. 50% of his free floating irrational anger went away without doing one other thing than his abstaining from interacting with a computer monitor. Amazing. The book is thick, but don't be intimidated. The claims she makes needs to be substantiated by science. She does this very thing in a very thorough way that demands copious notes and references. It is WORTH reading."

Your children need to learn they are ultimately responsible for setting their own limits. Kids who can set healthy limits for themselves do better in life. Teaching your kids to set healthy limits is a gift they will enjoy their entire lives.

Kathy Slattengren is an internationally recognized, inspirational parent educator and founder of Priceless Parenting, <http://www.PricelessParenting.com>. Priceless Parenting offers online [parenting classes](#), [parenting presentations](#) and [parent coaching](#). Parents learn to effectively handle misbehavior while building loving relationships.

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