



PEP Webinar | When to Set Limits and When to Let Go: Family Life in the Age of the Coronavirus Series lead by Dana Spencer

Worry = need for control

Now is a time with a lot of worry. When the human mind gets worried, it fixates on control.

- For adults that might look like telling people what to do, when to do it, and how to do it.
- For kids that might look like refusal, defiance, and tantrums.

In general, trying to exert control over others gets us the opposite response we wanted. This is because we **can't** control others—not our kids, not our partners, no one.

We can only control ourselves—our responses, our emotions, our behaviors, etc...

So what can we do with the worry and how can we set limits but avoid trying to control?

Managing emotions

Try “Name It to Tame It”

- Stop
- Recognize you are experiencing a strong emotion and name it
- Then tame it--identify what helps bring you control when you experience this emotion

With your child:

- Have them stop—you can even say that out loud
- Reflect/name their feeling for them, “You seem really frustrated”
- Name a strategy or two for them to use, “You can take a break with your toys or you can go get a cup of water/juice/etc.. and we will talk later.”

People with the highest levels of resilience:

- Recognize difficult emotions
- Can identify at least 30 different emotions
- Get curious about their emotions and know how to manage them

Rules versus Limits

Imagine a target like a dart board. A rule means you must hit the bullseye in order to get any points. A limit means as long as you hit the dart board, you can get a point, it doesn't have to be the bullseye.

Rules

- They are the bullseye--they are very specific and they are hard to hit
- Example, “You must brush your teeth right after dinner.” or “Bedtime is at 10:00, no arguments.”
 - These are so specific and really hard to hit every time, every night.

Limits

- They are the whole dart board; you can hit it anywhere and still get a point.
- Example, “You brush your teeth before light’s out.”
 - This keeps it broad and general. It can happen right after dinner, or before bath, or before pajamas, etc..
- Example, “You need a minimum of 8 hours of sleep and our day as a family begins no later than X. So figure out how you’ll get those hours each night.”

With limits, you have expectations, but they have some agency. You both have control in the situation.

Some common pitfalls when it comes to keeping limits

- Punishing/bribing: When we use these we teach our kids not to respect limits but to seek or avoid consequences.
 - Punishing = You need to do what I want or something bad will happen. (avoid)
 - Bribing = If you do what I want then something good will happen. (seek)
- Threatening: These are empty words and make it hard for a child to know when you are serious and when you are not.
 - Example: If you don’t clean this up then we will not facetime with your friends again.
 - You know this is not true. You know you will give in especially now when this is the only social time they get. So just don’t make the threat.
- Awfulizing: Imagining the situation as the worst it can be
 - Using words like “always” “never” “the most” or “the worst/least”
 - Example: “My daughter is the most disorganized person on the planet. She is never going to get herself together.”
 - Stop, what are you feeling right now?
 - You are feeling anxious and frustrated.
 - What’s true and what’s not?
 - It is **not** true that my daughter is the worst and so badly off that she will fail in life and never get into college or have a decent job.
 - It **is** true that she is struggling to wake up and get motivated to engage with distance learning.
 - Focus on managing your feelings and helping your daughter manage the **truth** of the problem.
- Blaming: This is closely connected to awfulizing.
 - We are blaming others when we need to get our own needs met.
 - It is our job to get our own needs met, not someone else’s.
 - Example: My partner never helps out with cleaning. I always do everything.
 - Your need is to have things clean in a certain way. That is not your partner’s need. How can you get your need met without putting it on someone else? How can you communicate your need to your partner to enlist help, not blame?
- Power struggles—These are never ending and will continue until someone loses and often it is you. Resist engaging!

- Micromanaging—This often comes from your own worry and stress. You get fixated on control.
 - Know when you can let go and give your child some agency
 - When we intervene or take over we rob them of the ability to learn responsibility, organization, making mistakes/failing, asking for help

Simple strategies for keeping limits

Routines

- Keep a routine, no matter how bare bones, and honor your kid's/partner's routines
- Anchor your day with meals, naps, and bedtimes and put everything else in around that even if not everything else gets done (i.e., school work, cleaning, etc...)
- Set up a structure for whose on duty
 - If you have a partner, take turns being the adult in charge
 - Give your kids tasks/duties to complete that benefit everyone
- Coordinate use of devices so everyone has a turn

Enlist help

- Work as a family to accomplish things
- From age 12+, have the kids be a part of setting the schedule and family plan
- Engage the kids in solving the problem, "Getting up in time for class seems hard, what are your ideas for making this work?" or "You've been asking for more screen time. I am willing to discuss one extra hour. You can use that hour all at once or break it into parts. What are you planning to do with the hour?"

Set the example and model behavior

- Reduce your time on screens
- Get outside and exercise
- Read, laugh, cook, unwind and let your kids see that
- Stay home and keep your distance from friends, families, neighbors

A limit worth setting should be a limit worth upholding

- Mean what you say and say what you mean
 - I do laundry on Wednesdays so if you need something before then, I will make sure you know how the washer and dryer work.
- Prepare for testing
 - Example: Bedtime when kids get up and come to your room. You walk them back to their room over and over and over. As soon as you give in, they know this is not a limit and all they have to do is be persistent and you will give in.
- With all limits, try them for at least 2 days before you re-evaluate or change

Contact the NPS Counselors

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