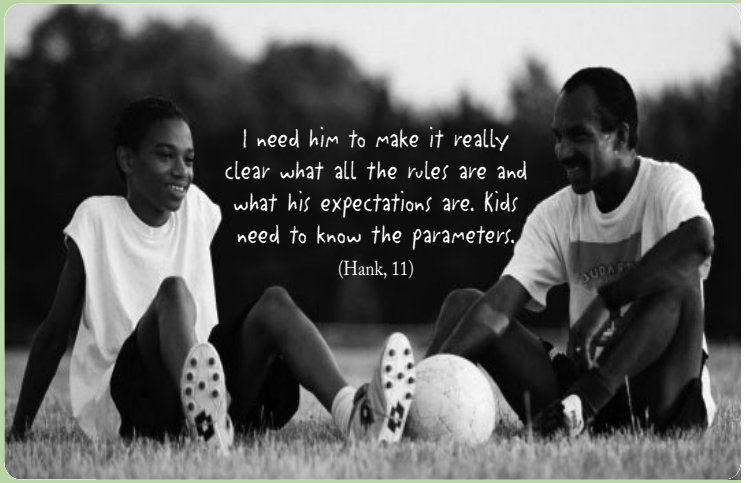
setting and



The Freedom of Limits

activities

SETTING LIMITS FOR USING VARIOUS MEDIA (It's not too early to start this at age 2.) Discuss why it's important to limit time spent using the media. Watching TV, using electronic games such as Game Boy, Nintendo, Pox, Barbie Fashion Designer and spending time on the Internet can get way out of hand if you aren't careful. Sometimes these games can become substitutes for babysitting. Extensive time using media takes away from other activities — either quiet time or time with other kids or adults. Set reasonable limits for using it with your kids. Together, come up with fair consequences if the limits aren't kept. Post the limits and consequences on the refrigerator so everyone can see them as reminders.

LIMITING OPTIONS FOR SMALL CHILDREN (2–4 years old) Kids can become easily overwhelmed — even immobilized — when they have too many choices. If you are in the habit of reading to a young child before naptime or bedtime, you may want to limit his choice of books to one or two. (It's also good to think about using a different, more soothing reading voice than you would at times when you are not as concerned about his settling down.) If you narrow his choice of books (and select ones that are not overstimulating), you give him a sense of choice without overwhelming him.

Activities to Do With Your Kids

ESTABLISHING FAMILY ROUTINES Sit down with your kids and parenting partner and talk about sharing some meals together, as an example. Explain why you value that time together. Ask each child for his or her ideas about when you could do it. Come up with times when sharing meals would work for your schedules. Could you rearrange your schedules so you could plan more meals together? Could you do your paperwork after the kids are in bed? You might decide that you could eat dinner together four times per week, or make breakfast on Saturday or Sunday mornings, where everyone could help make your family's favorite pancakes or other breakfast meal.

NOTE: Ask your kids what other family routines they would like to create.

ESTABLISHING CONSEQUENCES (For kids ages 6-10) What would be a reasonable consequence for something your child might do that would cause you concern? For example, what if your child went to a friend's house without telling an adult? Discuss this with your kids. Let them know that you care about them and would worry if you didn't know where they were. Tell them that you will do the same thing. When you leave, you will let them know where you are going. This practice establishes emotional safety and security.

testing limits

The goal of establishing limits is not to control children, but to help children learn to control themselves. Parents, however, often view setting limits and establishing rules as sources of conflict with their children rather than as valuable tools to minimize conflict and demonstrate parental concern.

Close your eyes and picture yourself driving across a very tall bridge, such as the Golden Gate or George Washington Bridge. Now imagine how you would feel if the protective guardrails were suddenly removed. With the railings in place, you feel safer and more comfortable as you proceed to your destination. You are able to respond to changing traffic and other circumstances. You feel freer to change lanes, speed up or slow down. You can proceed to your destination on the other side of the bridge with greater confidence because boundaries are safely in place.

Similarly, children feel more comfortable and confident when their boundaries, or "guardrails," are clearly in place. That confidence enables them to explore new terrain. But when boundary lines are unclear or nonexistent, kids will test the limits in order to discover where the lines are. Therefore, clear and consistent boundaries and rules should become an important part of your family's practices. If you establish boundaries early on, children will come to expect them, and they can be seen as a natural part of family life. Family rules reduce chances for head-on collisions and power struggles between you and your kids, especially as they approach adolescence, a time when they naturally take more risks and challenge authority.