

Is Your Child Out of Control?

*Learn How to Set Loving Limits
and Free Your Family From Tantrums*



**Learn how to discipline
your kids without losing
their love and respect!**

- You are not the only one who gets locked into **power struggles** with your children!
- Discover the harmful **consequences** of doing nothing!
- Learn three **simple strategies** for setting limits



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Do Any of These Scenarios Sound Familiar?

I'm going to lose my job if I'm late again today. Why can't Matthew hurry up and get dressed? He knows what to do, why won't he do it? **I hate myself for yelling and screaming, but that's the only thing he responds to.**

Look at this mess in the kitchen. Why didn't they do their chores? It's not like I'm asking a lot here. It's going to be exhausting getting into another fight. It's quicker and easier to just do it myself. But they're going to pay for this later!!

Late again pulling up to the school: "C'mon, now, get out of the car! Now, or else your sister is going to be late, too." Everyone is staring at us and watching him wail at the top of his lungs. Someone is going to report me for being a bad parent. This is so embarrassing. Why is it always us? Was I out of the room when they handed out the parenting toolkits?

Finally at work now - I feel like I've already had a full day, and just look at this stack of things to do. It's hard enough to concentrate when I'm this tired, but I'm also so worried about taking the kids to the mall tonight. What if he acts out again?

Here we go again! We were almost finished with only one more store and Matthew started screaming that he wanted me to buy him a toy. My husband and I had to drag him to the car and cut the shopping trip short. Now my daughter is furious because that was the only store she really wanted to go to. Everyone is angry and miserable.

It's time for bed but Matthew won't go. He's screaming and crying, I'm yelling and screaming, I just don't know how much more of this I can take. Everything feels so out of control.

The battles start again as soon as we wake up the next morning, but this time it's the grownups who are fighting. I'm just trying to get a little support, but we ended up arguing. We've almost completely lost "that loving feeling," because we're both so sleep-deprived and stressed out by the constant fighting in the house. The littlest things can set off an argument now, and instead of feeling like I have a partner to help me solve these problems, I feel isolated, angry and alone.

Harmful Consequences of Doing Nothing

Clearly, what you're doing isn't working. You're either giving in to your child's behavior or setting inconsistent limits. But what impact is it having? In the short term, you're noticing:

- Your emotions are on edge because of stress and sleep deprivation
- Your body feels run down and exhausted
- You don't feel a close, loving bond with your child
- You fight more with your spouse
- Your productivity is down at work
- You feel isolated and alone
- You feel completely overwhelmed and ready to snap
- You have no confidence in your ability to solve this problem

While none of that is any fun, what is even more alarming are the possible long-term effects on your child, if this continues:

- Your child may have difficulty with relationships as an adult
- Your child may not do as well in school and that will limit his possibilities
- Your child may be disrespectful and unkind to other people
- Your child may be anxious and tightly wound
- Your child may be more susceptible to peer pressure and not able to think for himself or herself
- Your child may direct his strong will destructively, rather than productively

Three Simple Strategies for Setting Loving Limits

Kids don't want limits, but they need them. When we set a limit, they don't say, "Hey Mom and Dad, thanks for that limit, it really makes me feel safe and secure!" Instead, they whine and argue, they complain and negotiate, they throw their bodies on the floor in a tantrum.

That's their job; they're scientists and everything is an experiment. It is our job as their parents to be their research assistants and show them what experiments lead to good outcomes and what experiments don't.

What's important is not that they're testing the limit, but rather what our reaction is to their whining, arguing, negotiating or tantrums. Rather than getting angry, reasoning or giving in, parents need to stay calm and keep firm with loving limits. Our kids need to know their parents are strong enough to keep them safe and to be there for them in this big scary world.

The next time you and your child disagree and the situation threatens to escalate out of control, try one of these simple tactics.

Becoming a Love and Logic™ Parent Strategy #1: End Whining and Arguing

How does every strong-willed child respond to having limits? “That's not fair! Please can I play with the toy? I promise I won't do it again!” And so on.

Instead of arguing with these statements, negotiating or defending the limit you've set, go "brain dead" by choosing a one-line phrase you can repeat over and over again. It can be like a mantra to help you stay calm and not engage.

Some of my favorites are “I know,” “Probably so,” or even “I love you too much to argue.” Parents should use a soft, calm, sing-song tone of voice so the message comes across empathetically and not sarcastically. Let's see how this would work.

Child: “It's unfair!”

Parent: “I know.”

Child: “But I really like the toy!”

Parent: “I know.”

Child: “But I won't do it again!”

Parent: “I know.”

You may wonder how long you'll be able to keep this up, but think about who is using the energy in this exchange. While this child may escalate and throw a fit to test Mom or Dad's new skill in the short term, it won't take long for him or her to learn that arguing will not bring results.

Here is what happened when one mother used this strategy:

"I am so excited to tell you that I had a Becoming a Love and Logic™ Parent moment just this morning. I poured my daughter a bowl of cereal with PLENTY of milk. When she asked for more milk and I said, 'No, you have more than enough.' Of course she started whining and I went brain dead!

She started screaming 'I want more milk!!!' I said, 'I know.' This went on for about a minute, back and forth. Finally I took her by the hand, led her to her room and said, 'Feel free to come out and eat your breakfast when you're done screaming.' She sat in there for about two minutes and then came out quietly, sat down at the table and ate her breakfast!!!

The most wonderful part was that I felt so calm and loving toward her the whole time! I never felt angry like I did before I learned this strategy. In the car outside of her school that morning, I gave her a big hug and kiss and said, 'Have a great day,' when she looked at me and said 'Mommy, I'm sorry for screaming about the milk.'

Becoming a Love and Logic™ Parent Strategy #2: Deliver Effective Consequences

How do you deliver effective consequences? Lock in the empathy before you deliver the consequence. Why? Effective parents have found that using empathy keeps the child in thinking mode (“When I misbehave, my life gets sad.”), whereas, when parents react with strong emotions, it keeps the child in an emotional mode (“I’m mad at my parents. Life is unfair. I’ll get back at them”).

Successful parents set the limit once and use a strong dose of empathy to deliver the consequence. For example, if the limit is “no hitting” and your child hits his sibling or playmate with a toy, your response would be, “This is so sad (empathy), it looks like you won’t be playing with that toy today (consequence).”

Find an empathetic statement that fits your style:

- So sad
- What a bummer
- Oh, sweetie
- Dang
- Oh, man
- Bless your heart

Here’s how one Dad used empathy:

Dad decided to take baby, new puppy and 4-year-old boy for a walk. The boy ran away from the Dad. Once the boy returned, Dad said with empathy, "This is so sad (empathy). We have to go home now since I can't be sure you'll stay with me (consequence)." This little boy started crying and Dad responded with his brain dead one liner, "I know." He kept repeating it over and over as his little guy whined and cried and complained.

Once at home, the evening continued as usual: dinner, bath and story with no more mention (or lecture or punishment) of the incident. At bedtime, the boy told his dad, "Dad, I'm sorry I ran away from you tonight. I'll always stay with you next time."

Do you see how this Dad preserved his relationship with his son by lovingly and empathetically setting limits? And do you see how his 4-year-old son was able to stay in thinking mode for several hours? Used on a regular basis, this strategy leads to the development of thoughtful, respectful, kind, and responsible kids.

But what if you can’t think of a logical consequence? What do you do for sassing, lying, biting, hitting or fighting with their siblings? What if your kids do something that leaves you speechless?

Then try the “Energy Drain.” Here are the steps:

1. Inform your child that you have an Energy Drain.
“When you _____ (lie, hit, fight, sass, bite, etc)_____that really drains my energy.”

2. Ask them how they intend to replace your energy.
“How are you going to put energy back in me?”
3. Ask them if they'd like some ideas.
Most kids will shrug and say “I don't know.”
Respond “Would you like to hear some ideas?”
4. Give them energy replacement options.
“Some kids decide to _____. How would that work for you?”

Fill in the blank with ideas for chores, rest or relaxation, such as:

- Vacuum
 - Dust
 - Clean the mini blinds
 - Clean the car
 - Clean the toilets
 - Hire a babysitter with your allowance so I can go on a date with your father.
That really charges me up!
 - Give me a foot rub and/or a back rub.
5. Give them a deadline.
“If my energy isn't replaced by _____ (dinner, bedtime, etc), then I'll have to do something.”

Don't remind or threaten. If it's not done, you'll have time to come up with another plan.

- Some parents are “too tired” to read bedtime stories, take kids to the park, etc, since their energy wasn't replaced.
- Some parents decide to “sell” some of their children's toys to pay for a babysitter to go out on a date.

Let's read about how one parent used the energy drain:

It was right before Halloween. It was the night planned for a surprise "ghost" visit to their friends (ringing the doorbell and leaving a surprise bag of candy.) It was also the night the kids decided to fight and squabble in the car and at home. Mom decided to try the "energy drain" for the first time. She calmly informed them that she was having an "energy drain," but the boys paid no attention until it was time to go "ghosting."

"Mom, let's go," they impatiently called. Mom was ready for them. "This is so sad, but I have no energy to drive you." The boys were stunned, but offered rather quickly, "What can we do to give you energy?" Mom said that since they had just finished dinner that her energy could be replaced if they would finish the dishes, or wipe the counters and tables, or give her a massage. The boys even started coming up with their own chores: "How about if I clean the floor? How about if I take out the garbage?" Mom replied, "Any of those would help me regain my energy," and went to read a magazine on the couch while the boys did their energy replacement chores.

"Amazingly," Mom told me, "they did a great job on their chores and as soon as they were done, we hugged and left to 'ghost' our friends." She even noticed that she did have more energy from resting and they were all happy and didn't fight the rest of the night!

Becoming a Love and Logic™ Parent Strategy #3: Get Kids to Listen the First Time

Consequences are important, but how do you get kids to cooperate without the resistance? How do you talk to kids so they respond without the repeated warnings and threats? To master this skill, you need to look at the issue of control.

Control is a human need: when we don't share control on our terms with our children, our children will take all the control on their own terms. How do we share control effectively? By giving choices. When we give choices, it's like putting a deposit in our kids' power bank. We want to make sure their power bank is full, so we get the cooperation when we ask the first time.

Four signs that a child's power bank is running low:

- Temporary deafness - they don't seem to hear us when we ask them to do something
- Temporary paralysis - they don't move when we ask them to move
- Oppositional defiance - doing the opposite of what we've asked
- Bossiness - to younger siblings, playmates at school

If you see these signs, it means your child's power bank is running low. That means you need to make a deposit by giving effective choices. Whenever you feel a command coming out of your mouth, ask yourself how you can turn that into a choice.

Instead of: "Put your shoes on."

Try: "Would you rather wear your sandals or your Crocs?"

Instead of: "Brush your teeth."

Try: "Would you rather use the red toothbrush or the green toothbrush?"

Instead of: "Do your homework."

Try: "Would you rather do your homework at the kitchen table or the dining room table?"

You as the parent decide what they're going to do, and then give them the choice of how they do it.

How to give effective choices:

- Give two choices that you are equally happy with and you don't care which one they pick
- Give them ten seconds to decide or you will decide for them
- Only give choices when things are going well
- Don't give choices of consequences for discipline - it's not a deposit in the power bank when you use choices that way
- Don't be afraid to make a withdrawal from the power bank

Parents wonder what to do if their child doesn't choose within ten seconds or if they ask for a third option that you didn't offer. Simply repeat, "What are your choices?" and then say "So sad, (empathy) you didn't decide in time, I get to pick!" If they start to whine and argue, you know what to do - go "brain dead" and repeat, "I know."

You may not think it's a big deal to give in on these things, but by sticking to the guidelines you will teach your child how to make good decisions fast. Years from now when they are sixteen and deciding whether or not to get into the car with a friend who has been drinking, they will have the decision-making tools they need.

Parents still need to boss their kids around sometimes, but that shouldn't be your only mode of communication with your kids. Give effective choices as often as you can and then be prepared to make a withdrawal.

Here is how one mom used this skill:

She was running late picking up her kids from school. Her son was scuffling his feet and dawdling, saying that he didn't want to leave yet, "I'm not going!" Mom said, "Andy, doesn't Mom usually give you lots of choices during the day?" "Yeah, I guess," he said. "Well, this time it's Mom's choice and we have to go now." Andy stood up, shrugged his shoulders, and walked out the door with her. Of course your Andy or Rachel may not always respond like that, but the odds will be higher if his or her power bank is full.

What do Parents Experience After Setting Loving Limits And Following Through With Them?

- Parents find it easier to stay calm and keep firm limits.
- Parents have more energy because they aren't using it all up arguing with their kids.
- Parents are less stressed and actually start looking forward to their kids' misbehavior because they know the more practice their kids get at home dealing with their mistakes; the better they'll be ready to handle the real world.
- Parents start having fun.
- Parents feel more confident and empowered.
- Parents start enjoying a peaceful home again.
- Parents stop feeling guilty or worried about their kids.
- Parents realize that it's okay if their kids are uncomfortable, unhappy or upset from time to time, because they know that kids learn to be better humans and more responsible adults if they've faced and overcome obstacles.

What do Kids Experience when their Parent Set Loving Limits?

In the short term, kids may be frustrated because their old techniques of arguing, whining, and negotiating are no longer having their intended effect (namely to get a reaction and/or to get their parents to change their minds). But before long:

- Kids feel empowered because they start getting some control in their lives by making choices.
- Kids feel less of a need to rebel and fight back because their power bank is full.
- Kids start thinking more about their actions and their internal voice reminds them, "When I make a bad decision, my life gets sad."
- Kids will feel a sense of safety and trust because their parents have shown that they will keep their word. By enforcing loving limits, their parents are sending the message, "My parents are strong enough to keep me safe."

Next Steps

You may be thinking - this all makes sense, this could really work for me, but how do I get started? How can I make sure I stay consistent with the implementation? How will I get my parenting partner on board? What if I have questions as I go?

Contact me to discuss your parenting challenges!

You can send a message directly through my website at <http://headandheartparents.com/contact/>. I will let you know if I think you would be a good fit for my parenting classes, counseling, eTalks and recommend books, CDs or DVDs to begin equipping your parenting toolbox. *When contacting me, there is no obligation to services or workshops and the call is completely confidential.*



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About Kerry Stutzman, MSW Owner of Head & Heart Parents



Kerry Stutzman, with her master's degree in social work and years of experience working with children, thought she was well-prepared for motherhood. What she discovered in herself while raising her three young children, however, were levels of frustration and impatience she never even knew existed! Her aggravation led her on a quest for ways to have more peace of mind, patience and grace with her precious little boys. Now she can be found smiling through the challenges and enjoying her children much more often.

Kerry lives in Denver, Colorado with her husband, her three sons, ages 10, 14 and 17 and her three stepchildren, ages 7, 11 and 14. Go ahead and count. That's 6 kids. 5 boys. 3 teens. She has a post-graduate certificate in Marriage & Family Therapy, a Master's degree in Social Work and a bachelor's degree. She became a certified Love & Logic instructor under the guidance of Jim Fay and Foster Cline in 1999.

Kerry has a private counseling practice and teaches Love & Logic parenting classes around the Denver area. She also offers parent coaching and does public speaking

To learn more about Kerry's services, visit her website at www.HeadandHeartParents.com.

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