



Setting Limits with the Strong- Willed Student



Basic Facts About Strong-Willed Children

- 1) Strong-willed children are normal...but they do have a well defined temperament!**
- 2) Strong-willed children are not all alike.**
- 3) Strong-willed children can be hard to understand.**
- 4) Strong-willed children require a lot of guidance and discipline.**
- 5) Strong willed children WILL test your patience.**

How A Strong-Willed Child Learns Your Rules

- **Tony**
 - **Sits down at circle and automatically “crashes” into the student next to him, causing the student to fall over.**
 - **“I’ve told him time and time again that it’s not okay to do that. We take care of our friends!” says his teacher, “but he does it day after day. I’m beginning to think he has a learning problem.”**
- **Tony’s teacher believes she is teaching a rule. But Tony is not learning the rule she is trying to teach. Why not?**

How Children Learn Rules

- **Jean Piaget**

- **“The thinking and learning of children is qualitatively different than adults. Children think and learn concretely. For younger children, immediate experience plays a greater role in shaping their reality.”**

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR TEACHERS IN THE CLASSROOM?



What Does This Mean?

- **Children's beliefs are largely determined by what they experience.**
- **What they see, hear, touch, and feel determines how they think things are.**
- **Their beliefs about how the classroom works are based primarily on their concrete experiences.**

What Does This Mean To You?

- **Adults teach their rules in two basic ways:**
 - **With our words**
 - **With our actions**
- **Both teach a lesson, but only your actions are concrete.**
- **So, actions not words define your rules for young children.**

Why Limits Are Important

- **Limits are like traffic signals by providing information in the form of:**
 - **Green light (it's acceptable)**
 - **Red light (it's not acceptable)**
- **These signals answer the questions:**
 - **“What's okay?”**
 - **“What's not okay?”**

Why Limits Are Important

- **Beneath the surface, limits answer a very different set of questions for children:**
 - **“Who’s in charge here?”**
 - **“How far can I go?”**
 - **“What happens when I go too far?”**
- **The answers to these questions help children determine whether compliance with your rules is mandatory or not.**

How Do Strong-Willed Children Do Research?

- **How do strong-willed children determine if what we ask of them is really expected or required?**
 - **Do they come up and ask you, “How much authority do you really have here?”**
 - **Or, “How do I know if you really mean what you say?”**
 - **Perhaps, “What are you gonna do if I don’t do what you ask?”**
- **This probably hasn’t happened much to you! So, how do strong-willed kids do research?**

**THEY JUST GO AHEAD AND DO
WHATEVER IT WAS THAT YOU
JUST ASKED THEM NOT TO DO!**

(i.e., They do research!)



What approach do **YOU** use to teach rules?

- **Research indicates that there are 3 basic ways that adults attempt to teach rules:**
 - **Permissive Approach**
 - **Punitive Approach**
 - **Mixed Approach**
- **Which approach do *you* primarily use?**

Permissive Approach

- **Adults who use the Permissive Approach of communicating rules believe that strong-willed children will follow a rule if they can just “understand” why the rule is important.**
- **The Permissive Approach emerged during the 60’s-70’s as a reaction against the autocratic and punitive approaches of discipline that were popular before that time.**

Permissive Approach

- **The Permissive Approach supports the use of a lot of verbal tactics:**
 - Repeating and reminding
 - Speeches, lectures, or sermons
 - Warnings and second chances
 - Reasoning and explaining
 - Bargaining and negotiating
 - Arguing and debating
 - Cooperate, please?

Permissive Approach

- Overall, the permissive approach is:
 - **Respectful, but not firm.**
- When using the permissive approach children learn a different rule than the adult intends because children hear one thing...but they experience something different.

Mr. Jones and Circle Time

- **It's Circle Time in Mr. Jones preschool class. All the kids are seated on their carpet squares. As the activity begins, Matthew, age 4, presses his foot against the little girl sitting next to him and then pulls on her sweater.**
- **On the next slide, let's take a look at Mr. Jones' permissive approach.**

Permissive Approach Diagram

A (Verbal Tactics)

Mr. Jones asks politely to stop--

--Matthew disrupts

Mr. Jones repeats request and reminds Matthew of rule--

--Matthew ignores and continues

Mr. Jones gives warning--

--Matthew stops, waits, then pulls sweater again

Mr. Jones reasons w/Matthew--

--Matthew denies everything/disrupts

Mr. Jones lectures Matthew--

--Matthew argues, waits, disrupts

--Matthew throws tantrum

B (Action step)

Mr. Jones sends Matthew to Safe Spot--

--Disruption stops

Examining the Permissive Approach

- Note that a lot of verbal tactics did not work for Matthew. He continued to do “research” and push Mr. Jones in order to discover how much he could get away with.
- Mr. Jones was attempting to communicate a rule through a lot of talking, but his lack of action was communicating a different rule.
- Mr. Jones’ action step (sending Matthew to the Safe Spot) answered Matthew’s research question (“How much can I get away with?”)

Punitive Approach

- **The Punitive Approach has been around for a long time.**
- **Children respond to coercion and punishment today the same way they did fifty years ago:**
 - **Compliant children cooperate**
 - **Strong-willed children rebel**

Punitive Approach

- **Adults who use the Punitive Approach usually find themselves in the role of a “judge” or “probation officer.”**
- **Their job is to determine guilt and impose penalties.**
- **Adults tend to control the problem solving process and penalties tend to be drawn out or an unreasonable fit for the “crime.”**

Punitive Approach

- Adult's who use the Punitive Approach tend to believe that children won't respect their rules unless they "fear" their methods.**
- The Punitive Approach tends to stop problems in the "here and now," but it doesn't teach independent problem solving in the long run.**

Punitive Approach

- Overall, the Punitive Approach tends to be
 - Firm, but not respectful.

Mr. Jones and Circle Time

- It's Circle Time in Mr. Jones' preschool class. All the kids are seated on their carpet squares. As the activity begins, Matthew, age 4, presses his foot against the little girl sitting next to him and then pulls on her sweater.**
- On the next slide, let's take a look at Mr. Jones' punitive approach.**

Punitive Approach Diagram

A (Verbal Tactics)

Mr. Jones gives stern look --

--Matthew disrupts

Mr. Jones threatens, "keep it up, and you know what happens next!"-

--Matthew ignores and continues

Mr. Jones (feels angry) threatens again--

--Matthew stops, waits, then pulls sweater again

Mr. Jones reprimands Matthew in front of class--

--Matthew denies everything/disrupts

Mr. Jones writes name on board--

--Matthew argues, waits, disrupts

--Matthew throws tantrum

B (Action step)

Mr. Jones sends Matthew to Safe Spot--

--Disruption stops

Examining the Punitive Approach

- Note that a lot of punitive tactics did not work for Matthew. He continued to do “research” and push Mr. Jones in order to discover how much he could get away with.
- Mr. Jones’ tactics will come at a high price: injured feelings, damaged adult-child relationship, angry power struggles.
- Mr. Jones’ action step (sending Matthew to the Safe Spot) answered Matthew’s research question (“How much can I get away with?”) but did so in a negative way.

The Mixed Approach

- This approach is a combination of the Permissive Approach and the Punitive Approach.**
- It is an approach that is characterized by inconsistency.**
- A lot of flip-flopping back and forth between permissiveness and punishment occurs in an attempt to get one's message across.**

The Mixed Approach

- **Adults tend to use two variations of this approach:**
 - **They start out Permissive, and when it doesn't work, they become Punitive.**
 - **They start out Punitive, and if it doesn't work, they use Permissive tactics.**

The Mixed Approach

- **Neither firm nor respectful.**

Mr. Jones and Circle Time

- It's Circle Time in Mr. Jones preschool class. All the kids are seated on their carpet squares. As the activity begins, Matthew, age 4, presses his foot against the little girl sitting next to him and then pulls on her sweater.**
- On the next slide, let's take a look at Mr. Jones' Mixed Approach.**

Mixed Approach Diagram

A (Verbal Tactics)

Mr. Jones appeals for cooperation --

--Matthew disrupts

Mr. Jones reminds and waits for cooperation--

--Matthew ignores and continues

Mr. Jones raises voice (feels exasperated)--

--Matthew stops, waits, then pulls sweater again

Mr. Jones complains; demands cooperation--

--Matthew denies everything/disrupts

Mr. Jones embarrasses Matthew in front of peers--

--Matthew argues, waits, disrupts

--Matthew throws tantrum

B (Action step)

Mr. Jones explodes and sends Matthew to Safe Spot--

--Disruption stops

Examining the Mixed Approach

- Note that the Mixed Approach strategy did not work for Matthew. He continued to do “research” and push Mr. Jones in order to discover how much he could get away with.
- Mr. Jones’ action step (sending Matthew to the Safe Spot) answered Matthew’s research question (“How much can I get away with?”) but did so in a negative way.

Setting Limits Effectively

- **Setting limits effectively requires a balance of firmness and respect.**
- **The is best accomplished by:**
 - ***Giving a clear message***
 - ***Providing limited, but reasonable choices***
 - ***Use instructive consequences that hold children accountable for their actions***

Giving a Clear Message

- **Be direct and specific: a clear message informs children, directly and specifically, what you want them to do.**
 - Not “clean up your mess!”
 - But, “Put the blocks back in the bucket.”
- **Be prepared to tell them when and how you want them to do it.**
- **The fewer the words the better.**

Giving a Clear Message

- **Use a normal tone of voice.**
- **Your voice should communicate that you are firm and in control.**
 - **Not anxious**
 - **Not stressed**
 - **Not angry**

Giving a Clear Message

- **Specify the consequences for non-compliance.**
 - **Tell him, in a normal tone of voice, what will happen if he doesn't cooperate. This is not a threat, you are simply being clear.**
 - **Remember, strong-willed kids want to know the bottom line, so give them the answer ahead of time.**

Giving a Clear Message

- **Prevent testing, right from the beginning, by providing your student with all the information he needs to make an acceptable choice using a normal or matter-of-fact tone of voice.**

Provide Limited but Reasonable Choices

- **Use limited choices is a highly effective method for handling testing while teaching your student responsibility.**

Guidelines for Using Limited Choices

**□ Restrict the number of choices
your present!**

- Limit the options to 2 (3 at most):
“You can sit by yourself or by your
friend Johnny.”**
- “You can help clean up in blocks
or in discovery.”**

Guidelines for Using Limited Choices

☐ Remember that the choices are YOUR limits.

– State them firmly with no wiggle room or you may invite testing!

“You can sit by yourself or by your friend Johnny.”

“You can help clean up in blocks or in discovery.”

Guidelines for Using Limited Choices

☐ State the consequences of your limits.

- “You can sit by yourself in the Safe Spot for 5-minutes, or you can sit by your friend Johnny and listen to a story.”**
- “You can help clean up in blocks or discovery and then line up for recess or you can sit at the table and stay inside. Which one do you choose?”**

Guidelines for Using Limited Choices

☐ Make the child responsible for their decisions.

– After presenting your choices w/consequences ask, “Which one do you choose?”

– This question places the ball in their court, or the responsibility in their lap, not yours.

Guidelines for Using Limited Choices

- When your child makes a choice but fails to follow through, implement the stated consequence.**
 - For example, if your student fails to help clean up but still lines up for recess you must simply follow through and make them sit at the table and miss recess.**

Examples of Limited Choices

- **“Mike, you can sit with your friends and eat lunch quietly or you’ll have to eat by yourself at another table. What would you like to do?”**
- **“Jessica, you can have “quiet hands” and play in Discovery or go to Library and read a book. Which one do you choose?”**

Examples of Limited Choices

- **“Isaiah, you can put Thomas the Train in your pocket or give it to me and I’ll put it in your book bag. What do you want to do?”**
- **“Beth and Michael, you can sit together quietly or sit apart quietly. Which one do you want to do?”**

Instructive Consequences

- **No matter how clear your message, children may still decide to test.**
- **And when they do:**
 - **It's time to act (talking is done).**
 - **You need to answer their research question with a concrete action.**
 - **Actions speak louder than words.**

Instructive Consequences

- **Consequences (actions) provide a clear answer to children's research questions.**
- **They teach what's acceptable and who's in charge.**
- **They teach responsibility by holding children accountable for their choices and behaviors.**

Instructive Consequences

- **Immediacy**

- **Consequences (actions) are most effective when they are applied immediately after the unacceptable behavior.**
- **Immediacy helps to make the cause-and-effect connection between the inappropriate behavior and the consequence that is experienced.**

Instructive Consequences

- **Consistency**
 - **Consistently applying consequences (actions) helps children to more quickly collect the data they need to arrive at the conclusions you intend.**

Instructive Consequences

- **Logical**
 - **When you fail to pay your phone bill, does the phone company respond by turning off your gas?**
 - **They shut off your phone service because it teaches you to be more responsible about paying your phone bill.**
- **Children also learn best when consequences are logically related to their behavior.**

A Few More Tips!

- **Research studies also encourage adults to:**
 - **Make eye contact with your child when setting limits.**
 - **Make physical contact when setting limits (i.e., place hand on shoulder or upper arm).**
 - **Place yourself within your child's personal space when setting limits (the closer you are the more impact your words will have).**

Wrapping It Up

- **You have learned some information and ideas to help you begin to set limits more effectively with strong-willed students.**
- **Your next step is to begin to put your new skills into practice.**
- **Give it time. Stick with it. Begin to enjoy the rewards of your efforts!**