

BEHAVIOUR BASICS FOR PARENTS

Giving You the Tools
from Schools

TRACEY CAMPBELL



Be the One Press

A division of **Together Transforming Behaviour Ltd**

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This book is dedicated to **my mum**,
For standing strong and staying hopeful.

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To the readers of *Behaviour Basics for Parents*, may this book provide just what you need to parent with increased confidence and insight into your children's behaviour.

Chapter Seven

How far is too far?



Setting limits, enforcing boundaries

Life without limits is lethal

A number of things around us have limits: how fast you can drive, the amount you can withdraw from a cash machine in a day, the number of minutes you can talk on your mobile phone for free. Limits are set, among other reasons, to keep people safe. Where children are concerned a life without limits is lethal.

My mum had a saying when we were growing up: 'Too much of one thing is good for nothing.' That is actually very true: too much sugar, too much salt, too much freedom, too many restrictions – they can have disastrous consequences. I think you see the point I am trying to make about parenting – it's about balance: love and limits, rights and wrongs, dos and don'ts. As important as it is to praise children and reward their efforts, it is equally important for parents to set limits to what is expected and accepted within the home. When these limits are clearly stated and consistently enforced children feel safe. This does not mean they will not kick against these boundaries, but ultimately they learn that the boundary is immovable.

Mr and Mrs Folake

The Folake household was a busy one with four children all under the age of ten years. Mrs Folake explained why, with this number of young children, she could not afford to be casual about boundaries.

'In our house it has to be clear otherwise we invite chaos,' Mrs Folake began. 'The children know that they can play in the garden, their bedrooms or the dining room but not in the living room. We do not compromise on that. We are also crystal clear about hitting and swearing – it is not allowed here. They have to find other ways to sort out

problems between one another, for example by using words to make their views known.'

I was impressed with how clear Mrs Folake was about the way she ran her house, but I also appreciated her honesty about the fact her children still tried to push the boundaries.

'Yes, on occasions I have caught my boys play-fighting in the lounge, but we have got to a stage where I have to say very little, the expectations are clear and often a reminder is enough. They do try to push it from time to time and if they could get away with it, I'm sure that they would do it more. Their dad and I are a good team; we work together and the children know that.'

Consistency and behaviour

When it comes to the management of behaviour, consistency is non-negotiable. Behaviour within the home cannot be managed effectively without a clear set of boundaries agreed and enforced by united parents. I lose count of the number of parents I have met who have tried to go about it in other ways and have failed miserably.

Positive behaviours need to be both taught and caught. Children need to be told but more importantly they need to be shown. When you combine consistency with the modelling of positive behaviour you are onto a winner. I was amazed at how many of the parents on *Mr Drew's School for Boys* swore in front of their children but then told their child off for swearing! You do not have to be a parenting or behaviour expert to know that this simply makes no sense. Your child will pick up positive behaviours far more quickly if they are modelled by you.

Consistency can be one of the hardest things to establish, but one of the easiest things to lose; it takes

real work to keep it going. This is why the discussions at the outset are so important. They establish the rationale for rules and routines and allow the non-negotiables to be agreed from the start. Parents are more likely to hold fast to something that they genuinely believe in, because when you understand why something is important you do not let it go easily.

Be careful to ensure that consistency is maintained especially during times of stress and pressure. If, for whatever reason, boundaries become loose – acknowledge with the child/children that things have not been as you would have wanted and let them know that things will be returning to normal.

Without such a discussion, parents can be perceived as being very unfair in the eyes of children, who have been led to believe that what they were doing was acceptable because it was not being challenged. This can lead to both resentment and anger.

Consequences do not work well when children are taken by surprise – they should know in advance what will result from poor behaviour choices. The ultimate aim is for consequences to work as a deterrent.

Without wanting to sound contradictory, I think it is also important to mention the need for flexibility even in the midst of a consistent approach. Children have different temperaments and this needs to be taken into account when it comes to dealing with behaviour. For example, some children do not respond well to public reprimand because for them the idea that they have disappointed a parent is catastrophic. In this instance, it would be more supportive to speak to the child in private rather than discuss the matter in front of siblings. Other children may require an immediate firm reminder about expectations because that is what works for them.

The point you want children to remember is that consequences follow poor choices. However, if your child is so distraught because of the approach you have taken this key lesson will be missed. Being flexible is not about changing an expectation of behaviour but rather about flexing the route that you take to arrive at the enforcement of an expectation.

Even when children have made mistakes and their behaviour disappoints us, they are still worthy of respect; even the application of a consequence should be done with due regard for the child's feelings.

Rule setting

The best way to set limits within the home is to have an agreed set of rules, which everyone is informed about. These should be displayed in a communal part of the house, such as on the fridge, where they can be easily accessed and referred to. The best approach to rule setting is collaboration rather than dictation. However, it is important for the adults to agree first of all what their expectations are before sitting down as a family. The discussion should be twofold: What rules do we want to have? Why are these rules important? Even in this collaborative approach, parents should not be afraid to state the non-negotiable expectations. There will be some things that must be enforced regardless of how children feel about it.

A set of rules might include:

- Speak positively to and about one another
- Clean up after yourselves
- Food is eaten in the kitchen/dining room only
- TV up to eight o'clock on school night
- Treat people how you want to be treated