

Can You “Enforce” Your Limits Without Force?

Written by Laura Markham for Aha! Parenting.

This is a terrific question: How can we “enforce” our limits?

The short answer is, we can’t force anyone to do anything. All we can do is help our child WANT to meet our expectations and help him develop the emotional regulation so he’s able to do so.

Sure, force, or the threat of force, works temporarily. Timeouts scare young children into complying because they’re a form of ritual, temporary abandonment. But they don’t teach kids to regulate the emotions that drove them to behave badly, so the misbehavior continues. Eventually, kids rebel and you have to escalate your force. You can drag your flailing child, but sooner or later you won’t be able to do that, and in the meantime she’s not learning to manage herself.

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