

FOLLOWING LIMITS

What is this developmental skill?

Following limits is the ability to accept reasonable boundaries established by caregivers and other adults. Healthy limits help children feel safe, learn self-control, and understand expectations.

How does this normally develop?

Children learn to follow limits through warm, consistent relationships. Caregivers repeatedly enforce predictable boundaries while helping children manage the emotions that arise when limits are set.

How can neglect interfere with its development?

Children who experienced neglect may have lived with inconsistent, absent, or unpredictable boundaries. Some become highly resistant because limits feel controlling or unsafe, while others have never learned what consistent expectations look like.

What might this look like?

A child may:

- Argue about every rule.
- Ignore instructions.
- Test limits repeatedly.
- Become angry when told "no."
- Escalate after correction.
- Seem surprised that limits remain consistent.

These behaviors often reflect uncertainty about safety and predictability rather than simple defiance.

Parenting Implications

Keep limits clear, calm, and consistent. Avoid power struggles. State expectations briefly, follow through predictably, and reconnect after correction so the child learns that relationships remain secure even when behavior is addressed.

From Understanding to Attunement

Instead of asking, "Why won't my child obey?" ask, "Has my child experienced limits that were safe and consistent?" Loving boundaries help children develop internal self-control.