

ACT – Guiding Children’s Behaviour



★ A – Acknowledge the child’s feelings, wishes or wants

This is an important step because it recognizes that a child does have feelings and that these feelings are acceptable. Verbalizing an empathetic understanding of the feeling often helps to diffuse its intensity. For example, “*You are **really mad** because you don’t want to come to circle time.*”

★ C – Communicate the limit

Limits should be stated simply and specifically. It should be clear to the child as to what is appropriate/inappropriate or acceptable/unacceptable. For example, “*We run in the gym. In the classroom we use walking feet.*”

★ T – Target acceptable alternatives

The child may not know other ways to express his feelings at that moment. The adult provides alternatives to the child. For example, “*If you are mad we can take some big breaths or we can go for a walk. We can sit together too.*”

Other examples using ACT:

A: “*You are **really mad** because Joe took your lego.*”
C: “*It is not OK to hit when we are mad.*”
T: “*When we are mad we can use our words to say we are mad, we can stomp our feet and take some big breaths or ask for help.*”

A: “*You are **really mad** because play time is over.*”
C: “*It is not ok to kick me when you are mad.*”
T: “*When we are mad we can use our words to say we are mad, we can stomp our feet and take some deep breaths, or ask for help.*”

A: “*You are **sad** because it is time to put the toys away.*”
C: “*It is not ok to throw toys when we are really sad.*”
T: “*When we are sad we can take some big breaths, we can say we are sad, we can ask for a hug or we can ask for help.*”

Adapted from *Play Therapy: the Art of the Relationship* (Garry Landreth, 2002)



ACT Worksheet



Example One

Your child wants a toy another child is playing with. He grabs the toy from the other child. The other child starts to cry.

- A You like to play with that truck.
- C We don't take toys from our friends.
- T You can ask to play with the truck later or choose another car.

Your child doesn't give the truck back after repeating the above statements a few times.

- A I know you like that truck.
- C You need to give back the truck.
- T If you choose to keep playing with the truck, the truck will go away.

Your child chose to keep playing with the truck. You have taken the toy away. Now he is frustrated and is starting to have a tantrum, kicking at the other toys on the floor. You remain calm, stay near him, and help him to manage his frustration.

- A You feel mad.
- C Toys are not for kicking.
- T When we are mad we can jump up and down or take deep breaths to feel better.

Model the target behaviors for your child. Stay calm and present. Help child to calm down.

Example Two

Your child is playing with blocks. It is time to leave for pre-school. You've asked him to help clean up the blocks. He is not listening to you.

- A _____
- C _____
- T _____

Your child does not help clean up the toys. As you model putting a block away, she throws a block at you.

- A _____
- C _____
- T _____

Your child is upset because the blocks are put away. She is lying on the ground, kicking her feet, and crying.

- A _____
- C _____
- T _____