



## Offering Information Using the Information Sandwich

It's helpful to set out your expectations so that your whole family is on the same page when it comes to setting limits and consequences. A useful technique to share limits and set consequences is the "Information Sandwich." It's a three-step process for making information, including limits and consequences, more "edible."

### The Three Steps are:

- 1. Ask Permission:** This is the conversational equivalent of knocking on a door before entering a room (and in some ways is also just the same kind of simple courtesy). By asking your child if it is okay (or useful, or a good time to talk, etc.) to give them some information before giving it, you allow them to invite you in -- to provide a 'green light' for entering. While this may sound like something you "shouldn't have to do," it can really shift the whole feel and tone of your communication.

*Examples: "Could I offer a thought?" "Would it be OK for me to tell you a concern I have about this plan?" "I wanted to talk to you about our expectations for summer/school/college. Is now a good time?" If they say "no," step away and don't give the information for now.*

*Tip: If the topic is really important, it can help to offer options for your invitation, such as, "I have something important to share with you. Do you want to talk now or wait until after dinner?"*

- 2. Provide the information** (or the "insides" of the sandwich): With the "door answered," this is your opportunity to share information, observations, options, constructive feedback, etc. In the case of limit setting, it's either to negotiate limits or to share the limits you've decided to set as well as the consequences.

*Examples: "You can use the car only if you put gas in it once a week. If you don't fill the tank, then you will lose privileges for the following week." "If you're going to be late meeting your curfew, please text me. If you forget to text, you will lose an hour the next time you want to go out." "If you are unable to maintain a B average while away at college, we will ask you to return home and continue studies at our local community college."*

- 3. Check back in:** The bottom layer of the sandwich is a way for you to make sure you were understood and offers your child a chance to discuss the topic further. Did your child understand the information the way you meant it? Are they upset by it? Did they reject it, appreciate it, or were sorry you said it? If you said something or got something wrong, it's a chance to fix things. If they were glad to receive the information, it's a chance for a positive acknowledgment.

*Examples: "Did that make sense?", "Do you have any questions about what I said?", "Do you have any concerns about complying with this expectation?"*

## Steps for Developing an Information Sandwich

**Step 1:** Write down the information or feedback you would like to give. Are there options?

**Step 2:** What kind of reaction do you imagine?

**Step 3:** How will you ask permission to give them this information?

“Could I offer a thought?” “Would it be alright if I shared a concern I have?” “I have something important to discuss. Is now a good time or after dinner?”

**Step 4:** Provide the limits and consequences or a framework for negotiating limits.

**Step 5:** How will you check for understanding? “Does that make sense to you?” “I’m not sure I said that very clearly.” “What are your thoughts?”

### An Example:

1. **Ask Permission:** “I have something important I want to discuss with you. Do you have a minute?”
2. **Provide the Information:** “I know I may not have been clear or consistent about language in our home, but I want everyone to be treated with respect. Going forward, the expectation in our house is no hurtful name calling when upset.”
3. **Check back in:** “What are your thoughts about this?” or “Is this something you can commit to?”

**What if my child doesn’t cooperate with my request?** It would be best if he is not willing to calm down or cooperate to simply remove yourself from the situation -- quietly -- letting him know that you will talk later when he’s calmer.

### Remember:

- **Don’t take it personally:** it’s not about you; keep the focus on what you are teaching your child.
- **Be prepared:** plan what you’re going to do and clearly state your limits.
- **Avoid power struggles at all costs:** otherwise, you’ve lost. Stay calm and keep your power.
- **Practice ‘selective ignoring’:** stay focused on the limit you want to discuss. This may mean ignoring rudeness or eye-rolling for now -- address that separately later.

*Material adapted from: The Workshop for Parents & Caregivers Facilitator Training Guide. Partnership for Drug-Free Kids & CMC: Foundation for Change, September 2018, v1.3*