



Figure 11-1. Show by your words and actions that you will keep children safe.

purpose of limit setting is to keep children protected and help them grow (Figure 11-1). It is not about overpowering or intimidating them. Let children know what is or is not okay to do. At the same time, it is crucial to convey that you care about them.

Establish and Implement the Rules

Children might be thinking:

I'm glad you're setting the ground rules. They help me follow what to do.

This is what I have to go by. If I don't do this, I'll get in trouble.

If other people aren't being nice to me, I'll tell.

You're nice, and you like other people to be nice too.

Rules define how everyone should act when they are together. They may vary depending on children's ages and the situation and setting. Three basic rules that apply to all are that no one is allowed to hurt themselves, others, or things.

Establish and State the Rules

When possible, have children establish the rules, write down their wording, and display them as a visual reminder.

In other situations, state what rules you have in that setting. Keep the list simple so children can remember them. Describe the rules by telling them what to do versus saying, "Don't..."

For younger children, it is best to use picture cues with the corresponding words. To ensure their understanding, give details about each rule and have them demonstrate the correct actions. Review them often. When children understand the rules, they are better able to follow them.

Fabulous Five: Teach the Rules

- **Have group members establish basic rules or guidelines.**

"We have to set group rules," I said to the group of fifth graders, pointing to a blank sheet of paper hanging on the board. "Of course the school rules are that you treat yourself, your friends, and all things with respect. What other rules should we have that will help us get along? I'll write them down for us."

"Take turns and share."

"No bad words. Only one person talks at a time."

"Be nice."

"No laughing at mistakes."

"Keep your hands to yourself."

- **State your rules.**

In the first session, I told the group of second graders, "I have two rules. First, you have to be kind—only say kind things and not mean things. Second, if you want something that is in my cart, you have to ask me. I will get it out for you."

The group nodded, showing they were listening.

- **Tell children what to do versus saying, "Don't..." when stating rules.**

"We get to go to the aquarium," the preschool teacher told the class. "We get to ride the bus there. Here are the rules for the bus. Number one is to talk quietly and use your inside voice. Number two is to stay sitting down."

"You might bang your face if you stand up," 3-year-old Darius added.

The teacher nodded and continued, "Number three is to wear your seatbelt. Buckle yourself in so you don't get hurt."

"You can't run in the school bus," 3-year-old Tracey said.

"Number four is to keep your hands inside."

"Yeah, something could hit your hand," Tracy added.

"Number five is to step off the bus," the teacher said, "and stay with an adult."

"If you jump out of the bus," Darius said, "you'll get hit."

"We want everyone to stay safe so we can have a fun time."