



## How Much Candy Should I Let Them Eat? The Bottomless Bag of Candy

*"A few months of consistency will earn you years of ease as the limits you set and uphold become woven into the very fabric of your household."*

As parents reflect during October, our minds turn to Halloween and then, naturally, to Halloween candy. Who can resist those tiny Butterfingers that you can pop in your mouth all at once, or the Dubble Bubble that takes you right back to your own childhood Halloween nights when you chewed four pieces at a time for ten minutes and then spit it out because it was already tasteless. The fantasies of an endless bag of candy suddenly bring to mind . . . limits!

How do you set limits with kids and, more important, how do you uphold those limits? Do you have an open candy bag policy for your kids until all the Halloween candy is



gone? Do you dole out three pieces a day until it's all gone (sometime in February, when the Valentine candy starts rolling in)? If that is your limit, do you keep the bag under lock and key or use the honor system? Do you have them pick out their favorite ten pieces and donate the rest to charity? Do you sneak all the Reese's Peanut Butter Cups after the kids have gone to bed and then feign innocence in the morning? While I can't give you the *right* answer, I can explore limits in general and then you might have a better shot at setting *and* upholding your own candy limit come the end of the month.

### A limit worth setting is a limit worth upholding

You will want to have as few limits as possible that are upheld with vigor. That's harder than it sounds. Take a minute and reflect on limits that are easy for you to uphold: bedtime at 8 pm sharp, no food outside of the kitchen, no soda in the house, hands washed before mealtimes. You probably are naturally setting and upholding the limits that reflect your core values - those are the easy ones. The limits that get us into trouble are the ones we are more wishy-washy about. "How do I feel about screens? Am I being too strict, not strict enough? What are the neighbors doing?" These are the limits that we need to take some time to think about and decide what is best for our family, for now. Limits change and grow as our kids change and grow.

## Great advice, but what happens when it doesn't work?

Good question, because sometimes it doesn't work. Sometimes we set a limit in advance and we have every intention of upholding it and then our kids completely *freak out*. Or, we set a limit, say, about screen time, and then we are in the middle of a good old juicy phone conversation with our sister and the half-hour-only limit becomes 45 minutes or an hour because it's more convenient for us. Upholding a limit - remember, we have very few of these - needs and deserves our full attention. It might be inconvenient but, once we set it, we gotta uphold it!

## Can I take a break yet???

Here's the deal. Once you set a limit, consistency is the name of the game. In my PEP classes I always teach that our kids' agendas are much more open than ours. They figure, "Well, I've got nothing on my agenda besides bath and bedtime, so why not throw a temper tantrum about one more show (or cookie, or ten minutes at the park, or the play dough). I have time and, goodness knows, they give in sometimes just to have peace." We want to train our kids that we mean business with our limits and we can't be shaken or broken down with a few tears or tantrums. So, the answer is no - no breaks for you on the *very few* limits you have decided to set. A few months of consistency will earn you years of ease as the limits you set and uphold become woven into the very fabric of your household.

## Did I answer your question?

No, I can't tell you how much candy is OK for your child or how to dole it out. I'm sorry, I wish I could. However, why don't we all take a minute and decide on our own candy limits. Why don't we discuss it with our kids and get an idea of what they think is a good limit and let it marinate for a week or so. Around October 25<sup>th</sup> let's all be very clear with our kids about the candy limit come Halloween and review the details about candy eating. Then let's all practice upholding the limit we decided on together. We'll support each other in our PEP classes and our communities, whether we are a three-piece-a-day or a have-at-it kind of family. But please, save me the Reese's!

*Paige Trevor is a certified parent educator and leader of the PEP I class scheduled to begin Thursday evening, Oct. 20, at Temple Micah in Northwest DC. This article was originally published in the Glover Park Gazette, October 2011, and is reprinted with permission.*

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